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Dissertation

**SUBJECTIVITY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM:
THE CASE OF HEGEL AND PLATO**

by

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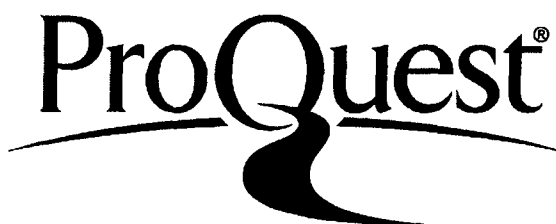
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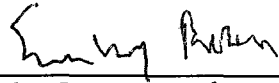


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Factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio

Augustini, Confessiones IV, iv, 9

Ψυχῆς οὖν φύσιν ἀξίως λόγου κατανοῆσαι οἶει δυνατόν εἶναι ἄνευ τῆς τοῦ ὅλου φύσεως;

Phaedrus 270c1-2

Dedicated to the memory of my father

אהרון שלום בן פנחס גרמן ז"ל

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As she well knows, nothing would have been possible if not for my wife, with whom all things are possible. The support of my mother, expressed in manifold ways, was invaluable, as was my young daughter, whose mere presence was enough.

SUBJECTIVITY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM:

THE CASE OF PLATO AND HEGEL

(Order No.)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates divergent treatments of self-consciousness in antiquity and modernity. Specifically, it asks why, despite the affinities of Hegel's conception of *Geist* with certain Platonic themes, Plato does not regard self-consciousness as a philosophical first principle. The first chapter begins with Hegel's charge that Plato fails to grasp the full implications of self-consciousness' reflexive and self-determining character. For Hegel, self-consciousness, if understood dialectically, points toward a self-knowledge which is identical with "Absolute" knowledge of the whole. By contrast, Platonic *noêsis* (intellectual intuition of determinate form) renders self-knowledge impossible. The soul cannot grasp itself since it has no "form," and *noêsis* lacks any reflexivity. We thus lose ourselves in the exercise of our highest capacity. Platonic thought accordingly culminates – from a Hegelian perspective – in the impossibility of wisdom and in alienation.

Each subsequent chapter addresses some part of this critique. In the *Charmides*, Critias attempts to justify his thymotic self-assertion by identifying virtue with a self-

knowledge which is identical with comprehensive knowledge. This attempt founders, however, on its inability to explain the connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of the good. The *Symposium* chapter argues that the relationship between eros and logos in the speeches of Diotima and Alcibiades sheds light on why, for Plato, both desire and discursive thought are necessarily derivative of a prior intelligible order which they cannot constitute. An analysis of the Sun, Line, and Cave images in the *Republic* completes the account by showing that *noêsis* must be passive and receptive rather than active and constructive if a distinctly human way of being is to be at all comprehensible.

Finally, I argue that, in its broad outlines, the modern conception of self-determining and self-reflexive subjectivity is already visible in Plato's dialogues but rejected by him. The soul ultimately depends for its very coherence upon the prior intelligibility of nature as the standard for "remaking" ourselves under the rule of reason. Surprisingly, then, the subject cannot be an origin or first principle for Plato because, in modern, or perhaps even post-modern fashion, it is itself a result, the product of the rational work of self-perfection.

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NOTE ON TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Plato – All translations from the Greek are my own. All Platonic dialogues will be noted in this dissertation using the Stephanus pagination and the abbreviations taken from the Liddell, Scott, Jones, Greek-English Lexicon. For the reader's convenience, abbreviations of the dialogues treated most extensively in the dissertation are reproduced below:

<i>Alc. 1</i>	<i>First Alcibiades</i>
<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apology of Socrates</i>
<i>Chrm.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistles</i>
<i>Grg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Laws</i>
<i>Men.</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Prm.</i>	<i>Parmenides</i>
<i>R.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>

Hegel – Translations from the German are my own, but I have referred to English translations as noted in the Bibliography. For ease of reference I have decided to note both the pagination of my German edition (by Suhrkamp) and the page or paragraph numbers in popular English translations (such as Miller's translations of the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* and the Haldane-Simson translation of the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*). Below are the abbreviations of the main Hegel texts:

<i>PdG</i>	<i>Phänomenologie des Geistes</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften</i>
<i>WdL</i>	<i>Wissenschaft der Logik ("Greater Logic")</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>Philosophie des Rechts</i>
<i>PSS</i>	<i>Philosophy of Subjective Spirit (1827-28)</i>
<i>VGP (I,II,III)</i>	<i>Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie (3 vols.)</i>

* In references to the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right* (A) denotes the *Zusätze* recorded by Hegel's students and (R) the oral remarks of Hegel in elucidating the section being discussed.

** While preparing this manuscript in Israel, I did not have available a critical German edition of Hegel's 1827-28 Lectures on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit. I have accordingly relied on William's new English edition published by Oxford.

INTRODUCTION

A central contention of the present study is that subjectivity is now, and has always been, a philosophical problem. That the “subject” is a central theoretical and practical concern of modernity certainly needs no recounting here. Our higher spiritual culture in its entirety attests to it. But that we might better and more philosophically understand modern subjectivity through the study of a Greek thinker of pre-modern and even pre-Christian antiquity would appear to require some justification.

Banality, bred by a long familiarity, has turned “subjectivity” into one of those shibboleths which accumulate a great profusion of uses in almost direct inverse proportion to the clarity of their intended meanings. For the psychologist, the unique interiority that constitutes the “self” is its subjectivity. For the anthropologist, the historian, and the literary critic, identities are now routinely referred to as subjectivities, which are purportedly “constructed” in (or as) the shifting “narratives” which we tell ourselves and others. For those of a more epistemological cast of mind, opinions, points of view and judgments may be “merely” subjective (or at best “inter-subjective”) as opposed to objective, and it has become a question whether or not the search for objectivity is itself a reflection of subjective needs and impulses. These resonances are not altogether unrelated to the philosophical sense which will concern us here; indeed, in an important way they derive from it.

The roots of the modern concern with the subject lie in the collapse of the classical conception of the world as both *kosmos* and *phusis* – that is, as an intelligible and

hierarchical order of distinct kinds of beings, which is both the source of the structure of experience and the standard to which judgments of better and worse are ultimately directed. In becoming unmoored from the binding character of world as *kosmos*, the individual becomes a philosophical problem to himself in a new way. The individual is conceptualized as an independent source of value and normativity while individual self-preservation and satisfaction, rather than theoretical perfection, emerge as a philosophical problematic. As a philosophical theme, then, subjectivity has been central since at least Hobbes and Descartes and, most significantly, since Kant's epochal denial that the essential nature of objects of experience can ever be present to cognition without already being mediated by the very structure of cognition itself.¹

By subjectivity in a specifically philosophical context, then, I refer to the contention that the fact of self-consciousness can or must serve as the first principle or ground from which theoretical and practical accounts of the whole of human experience are derived. Of course, philosophical subjectivity in this sense remains essentially linked to particularity or individuality – to the individual “self” as a locus of peculiar interior experience, as a legislator of its own ethical and political norms, as having a capacity for goal-oriented action or “agency”. Modern subjectivity arguably reaches its apogee,

¹ For historical and philosophical treatments see Remi Brague, *Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), Alexandre Koyré, *From Closed World to Infinite Universe* (New York: Harper, 1958) and Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 1996) and especially Blumenberg's chapter titled, in the English translation, “World Loss and Demiurgic Self-Determination.” A wide ranging and yet thorough historical overview is found in Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

however, in the German Idealist tradition which sought to articulate a comprehensive transcendental or speculative account of how the self-conscious subject constitutes its objects independently (or almost independently) of any prior and “merely given” natural order. It might be a chronological mistake to claim that the whole problematic of modern subjectivity, from its earliest manifestations onward, constitutes an attempt to understand the implications of Kant’s definition of the Enlightenment as man’s cutting himself loose from the apron strings of “tutelary” nature.² It would not, however, be a philosophical one.

But is all of this not utterly foreign to the atmosphere of the Platonic dialogues and to the Greek spirit in general, which did not even have a word that captures everything which is implied in what we call the subject? I have no intention of arguing that Greek thought is subjective in the sense outlined above. Equally, however, one must not be misled or intimidated by the technical, and often unreflective, jargon which has sprouted around this topic: the very distinction of “subject” from “object” derives from the more fundamental and primordial question concerning the relation of Thought and Being, and this, of course, was perfectly visible to the ancients. Furthermore, interiority and individual experience, to say nothing of the phenomenon of self-consciousness, were well known to the Greeks. Indeed, it is not even clear how such

² *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxiii. And cf. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:425.

things could ever escape the notice of any minimally wakeful human being.³ What does seem to be absent in Greek thought is the elevation of self-consciousness to a question of *prima philosophia*. This absence is what needs to be explained. This study will endeavor to do so by investigating why subjectivity does not have such a constitutive status in Plato.⁴ More particularly, I hope to argue that the different status of subjectivity in Plato results not from some ancient naïveté, now irrecoverable after the great upheavals of the spirit wrought by Christianity and modern natural science. Rather, there is good evidence that the outlines of the modern position are already visible in the dialogues and that the "absence" results from Plato consciously thinking through a concatenation of philosophical problems and possibilities which are surprisingly close to our own. Nevertheless, it is clear that the thinking embodied in the dialogues rejects self-conscious subjectivity as a philosophical *archê*. A fully reflective philosophical

³ Indispensable in this regard Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008). William's demolition of the view that the Greeks lacked an experience of interiority and self-consciousness adequate to the development of a modern concept of subjectivity leaves not one stone unturned upon the other. Cf. also Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2006).

⁴ The post-Hegelian situation is of course "subjective" in a far more radical sense which, in many cases, altogether denies that there is an objectivity to be found either within or outside of the subject. I will leave this aside for now, mainly because (as I will argue in the conclusion) the post-Hegelian situation has not advanced beyond Hegel in any decisive sense. For the history of this process up to Nietzsche, see Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964) and "The Historical Background to European Nihilism" in *'Nature, History and Existentialism' and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. Arnold Levison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

modernity must uncover and think through again the theoretical armature which underlies this rejection.⁵

As is obvious, any work which ventures upon on the famous “quarrel between the ancients and moderns”, and certainly one such as this, is liable to open up an enormous complex of issues, each of which easily merits a book-length treatment of its own. To mention personal identity, agency, freedom and the discursive accessibility of consciousness to itself would only begin a proper list. In order to get an arm around a manageable piece of all this, I will concentrate on one - in my view determinative - aspect: the absence of a fully articulated doctrine of self-knowledge in Plato.

On the one hand, in *Alcibiades I* (among other places) Socrates insists that self-knowledge is the one thing most needful for man since without it no one can possibly hope to discern whether there is profit in the knowledge or use of anything else.⁶ And yet - to sketch what obviously demands a much more thorough treatment - the dominant conception of knowledge in the dialogues is of purely objective *epistêmê*, in which an object is grasped in its determinate nature in such a way that what is known is precisely this or that determinate form, and not the cognitive activities of the soul. In knowing something we know that thing, we do not at the same time or in the same way know ourselves. But then, how *do* we know ourselves? Do we grasp ourselves as another “thing” among things? Or does self-knowledge require a different kind of

⁵ See Klaus Oehler, *Die Lehre vom Noetischen und Dianoetischen Denken bei Platon und Aristoteles* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1962), 6-7.

⁶ *Alc. I*, 133c-21-23.

knowing appropriate to the soul, an object so manifestly different from a “form” or fixed intelligible structure? In the former case, we seem to objectify and thus kill what is unique about the living soul in the very effort of trying to know it. In the latter, however, we are left without an account of the unity of the two kinds of “knowing”, and thus, ultimately, without an account of the whole. Once again, we find ourselves confronted with another version of the old Platonic nemesis: *chôrismos*, or separation, in this case, a separation between knower and known which, unless it can be traversed by means of *logos*, calls into question the very coherence of philosophy understood as the love of wisdom, of that knowledge which can give an account of itself.

This exceedingly rudimentary summary should at least suffice to indicate the importance of Hegel in what is largely a close textual analysis of Platonic dialogues. For it was Hegel who sought to find a new road through the seemingly impassable *aporiai* of Platonic self-knowledge and show how these very paradoxes become, when thought through completely, a demonstration of the isomorphism between the conceptual development of self-consciousness into self-knowledge and the development of philosophy into comprehensive, or Absolute, science. Stated alternatively, Hegel endeavors to demonstrate that self-knowledge is in fact possible because self-consciousness is *Geist*, a fully reflexive and articulate knowledge of itself as the unity of subject and object. Despite appearances to the contrary, Platonic and Hegelian thought prove to be remarkably close to one another at certain crucial junctures. For this reason, a study of Hegel’s critique and transformation of Platonic *epistêmê*, which occupies the

first chapter of this work, sheds valuable light on how and why Plato chose to walk a different path.

Obviously, however, self-knowledge is a central theme in many of the dialogues and, quite arguably, in all of them. And yet I will elaborate a Platonic “response” to the Hegelian critique by focusing on selected passages in only three dialogues: the *Charmides*, *Symposium* and *Republic*. Once again, then, an explanation is necessary, in this case, of my departure from a deeply held conviction that the proper unit of interpretation in Plato is the single dialogue. The whole wealth of detail – dramatic and argumentative – in each dialogue must be understood as a unity, before one turns to the relation of one dialogue to another within the Platonic cosmos.⁷ In my defense, I can only say that my reasons for concentrating on these particular dialogues rest precisely on the importance of dramatic context in understanding the dialogic cosmos.

⁷ This is the place to make two procedural remarks. First, I accept the authenticity of the entire corpus, including the *Epistles*, as transmitted by Thrasyllus. Although the received wisdom regarding authenticity in the Platonic corpus is undergoing a salutary reappraisal, this remains a minority opinion. Since this work does not touch on dialogues whose authenticity is in question, I limit myself to noting that the endeavor of excising texts as “non-Platonic” because they do not conform to philosophic or stylistic standards which we posit as “properly Platonic” is infected with a hopeless circularity. Second, I have nothing to say regarding the dominant scholarly concern with the chronological dating of the dialogues as early, middle or late and the development in Plato’s thought which this chronology is supposed to indicate. I have nothing to say because it seems to me that even if true, this “development” tells us almost nothing of philosophical interest about the dialogues and the theoretical issues they raise. Those issues are understood only by actually philosophizing, that is, by trying to follow the development of thought in the dialogues, for which there is ample evidence, rather than the purported development or progress of their author, for which there is far less. The attempt to determine a precise chronology of the composition of the dialogues has yielded many valuable insights. However, the entire approach is fatally undermined by the absence of even a single “control” dialogue, the date of which we can know beyond peradventure; q.v. Cicero *De Senectute*, v, 13.

To wit, each dialogue is as a window onto the whole, a window through which the view is refracted not only by the subject matter being discussed but also by the particular natures and characters of Socrates' interlocutors.⁸ The particular refracted vision of each dialogue illuminates some important contour of human nature, a contour which Plato reveals by placing this or that character in this or that theoretical or practical context. And in this regard it is noteworthy (and duly noted by Hegel, among others) that Socrates is often found discussing the deepest and most complex questions of introspection, self-knowledge and the nature of wisdom precisely with those of his students who manifest a particular inflection of human nature – the tyrannical (or at least, the timocratic and proto-tyrannical). This is famously true of Alcibiades (both in the dialogues which bear his name and in the *Symposium* where he makes a spectacular appearance), as well as Critias, and to a considerable extent, Glaucon.⁹ The juxtaposition of tyranny and subjectivity is counter-intuitive only as long as one considers tyranny to be primarily a political category, the limit case of the worst possible regime. But the evidence of the dialogues shows that Plato apparently found something about the intensely thymotic and erotic nature of the tyrant to be especially suitable for discussions of the nature and possibility of self-knowledge even in contexts which transcend the political as such.

⁸ In this regard, Hegel seems to me to be seriously mistaken in saying that, other than Socrates, all other characters in the dialogues are "plastic personages as regards the conversation; no one is put there to state his own view, *pour placer son mot*." (VGP, II, 26, 17)

⁹ The same is true of the *Parmenides*. Young Aristotle will later become a member of the Thirty Tyrants.

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel gives his interpretation of this fact: Socrates, by his very example, awakens in his brightest and most spiritually powerful students an awareness of the full magnitude of what is implied in their erotic, political and intellectual desires. He points them toward the comprehensive rationality of the whole, of which their desires are but intimations or incomplete images. However, Socrates is not yet in a position to fulfill the hopes which he awakens. Instead, Socratic conversation proves to be an acid which dissolves traditional Greek *Sittlichkeit*, the only horizon of value familiar to these exceptional young men, while his insistence that he knows only his own ignorance means that he provides no answers, literally no new ground on which they can stand. One shape of the Spirit is dying, while another is not yet ready to be born. Socrates, according to Hegel, assumes that eros can remain philosophical while being denied any hope of definitive satisfaction by wisdom. This assumption, however, is unwarranted. When it is denied the satisfaction of knowledge, philosophical eros turns inevitably toward tyranny, toward mastery over the merely human whole, the city.

But could an Alcibiades or a Critias ever be satisfied with the kind of knowledge and the kind of life which the philosopher seeks? Here we approach the question which divides Plato from Hegel. Summarily stated, because for Plato thinking is both *dianoia* (discursive or conceptual thought) and *noêsis* (intellectual intuition), philosophy ultimately depends upon a capacity which is receptive to intelligible structure but unself-conscious. Philosophy emerges from the irreducibly selfish desire to know but

includes a moment of “self-forgetting” in which individuality subordinates itself to intelligibility. The philosopher is satisfied by this subordination; the tyrant can never accept it. Eros taken by itself, then, does want to be satisfied but it does not necessarily desire *philosophical* satisfaction, which is why it can be a tyrant or a sophist as well as a philosopher. The soul is needy in Plato, just as phenomenological consciousness is an “unhappy” (or incomplete) consciousness in Hegel at every stage prior to Absolute Knowing. The Platonic soul is not, however, dialectically developmental in the Hegelian sense; it does not produce its own satisfaction from within itself.

For Hegel, by contrast, both Socrates and his students have failed to understand that the nature of knowledge is at one and the same time scientific (or objective) and spiritual (or subjective). Tyrannical and philosophical love, individuality and universal truth, are in fact two lines converging on the same point: the moment in which Spirit fully realizes that in knowing its object it knows itself. The disagreement between Plato and Hegel can therefore provisionally be said to concern *how* subjectivity is completed or satisfied: reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) or *ekstasis*.

This dichotomy is clearly a massive oversimplification, and the balance of this study must supply the details. The first chapter will accordingly be dedicated to as full an exposition of Hegel’s critique of Platonic philosophy as space will allow. Each of the subsequent chapters takes up, in its own way, some part of this critique. The second chapter treats Critias’ speeches in the *Charmides*, and the way in which his thymotic self-assertion develops into the claim that *sôphrosunê*, identified with self-knowledge, is

identical with a comprehensive and reflexive “knowledge of all knowledge”. The next chapter, on the *Symposium*, uses the relationship between eros and logos in the speeches of Diotima and Alcibiades to cast some light on the absence in Plato of two closely related Hegelian doctrines: the dialectical rationality of self-conscious desire and the comprehensive scope and constitutive power of discursive thought. Finally, a study of the three images of the *Republic* completes the account by examining why Platonic *noêsis*, and therefore *psuchê* as a whole, must be separate from and subordinate to the Good.

Ultimately, then, Plato and Hegel are brought into conversation with one another, by showing that to some extent, the conversation was one which Plato was already having with himself, in the dialogues. It is of course a quite simple matter to see that Hegel could address himself to Platonic texts which he had read and to Platonic philosophical themes which have persisted throughout the history of philosophy. By contrast, that there could be a Platonic reflection on Hegelian themes must seem, at first, to be nothing short of perverse. Such an assessment, however, rests upon the now almost universal assumption of the absolute priority of history over nature, an assumption which entails a denial of the possibility that fundamental philosophical problems and the rather limited set of their seriously conceivable solutions might be accessible at any historical moment to thinkers of the first rank.¹⁰ If it does nothing else,

¹⁰ We have, of course, inherited this assumption from Hegel’s famous assertion in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that “every individual is a child of his time” and that philosophy “is its own time comprehended in thought”. Unfortunately, we have done so while largely ignoring Hegel’s related insistence that the only person who can know this, who can *know* that all others

a close examination of the way in which Hegel and Plato went about the business of thinking the problem of self-knowledge should serve to temper the confidence of our assumptions and thereby also our convictions about the unprecedented nature of the present philosophical moment.

are essentially and inescapably children of their times is the philosopher who stands at an absolute moment which is no longer in time. This insistence of Hegel's is now judged to be ridiculous by most people. Laughter, however, does not constitute a refutation.

CHAPTER 1

Hegel's Critique of Plato

Before turning to the details of this chapter, a word is in order concerning the choice of Hegel as the representative of modernity, since even a cursory familiarity is sufficient to establish that he differs in many important respects from all other early modern and Enlightenment thinkers. And yet a case can be made for him as the most comprehensively modern and radical critic of Plato – radical in the original etymological sense of descending to the roots. His comprehensive radicalism arises from his assimilation and transformation of two different, but closely related, modern critiques of antiquity.

On the one hand, Hegel is most certainly a modern in his rejection of the classical identification of the *summum bonum* with the life of theoretical contemplation of an intelligible order which is independent of and prior in dignity and importance to human individuality. In addition, he adopted the charge (found in Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes and Locke among others) that the ancients had concentrated on defining the virtues and the *summum bonum* but failed to guarantee their *actualization*.¹

¹ See Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, I:8: on the “very magnificent palaces” of ancient virtue built on nothing but “sand and mud.” And cf. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, para. 245 on the ancients who left virtue “unendowed” and Francis Bacon, *Works*, ed. James Spedding (New York: Garrett Press, 1968), vol. III, 418: on how, in their writings on the “Will of Man” (which Bacon identifies with Appetite) the ancients treated the moral sciences as one who tries to teach penmanship by exhibiting good and fair copies of the “alphabet, without giving any precepts for the carriage of the hand and the framing of the letters.”

In contrast to other thinkers, however, Hegel did seek to preserve the classical ideal of a supreme good which orders human life; he only seeks to transform it. This *summum bonum* is no longer identified with contemplation but rather with discursive thinking of the whole by the philosopher who comes to understand thereby the identity of his individuality with the Absolute and who can realize this identity in a truly rational political order. Secondly, Hegel believes that his logical and phenomenological accounts provide for the actualization of the good life by explaining what Plato fails to explain, namely, how irrational desire is refined into rational eros and how such eros is satisfied or “reconciled” through comprehension of the actual unity-within-difference of Thought and Being, of *noein* and *einai* – the great unrealized goal of philosophy at least since Parmenides.² In other words, it is crucial to note that for Hegel the problem is not that the classics set an unattainably high bar for human excellence. Rather, they do not set it high enough.³

Here we come specifically to the case of Plato. Hegel’s radical modernity stems from his attempt to ground the Platonic superiority of the theoretical life on the modern

² E §465A: “....the presupposition of the unity of thought and being underlies all our actions.” Cf. PSS, 239: “In order to know what the heart of a matter is, I must reflect. This is an ancient prejudice of which humans are convinced. In order to know the thing itself, reflection is necessary, the most rigorous reflection. This is the meaning of the assertion that the true is the unity of thought and being.”

³ This point is made with clarity by in H.G. Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. by P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 58-59: “Hegel is seeking a kind of reconciliation here between the “anciens” and the “modernes”. For Hegel there is no opposition between existing reason, existing spirit, *logos*, *nous*, *pneuma*, on the one hand and the *cogito*, the truth of self-consciousness, on the other. The course of appearing spirit is the course which Hegel follows in teaching us to recognize the standpoint of the “anciens” in the....“modernes.”

“metaphysical” conception of subjectivity. Hegel does not merely claim that Platonic philosophy has been superseded by modernity (which would hardly be unique to him). He claims rather that the grounding and perfection of Plato’s thought only *becomes* possible within modernity and specifically only within the Hegelian system.

It is not sufficient, then, to treat only Hegel’s explicit critiques of Plato. We must also turn to those details of his phenomenology and logic which directly bear upon the critique of Plato even where the latter is never named. We begin, then, with a synoptic view of Hegel’s explicit references to Plato (especially numerous in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy) and continue with an explication of the crucial concepts of desire, recognition (*Anerkennung*) and self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. The close link between self-knowledge, qua full self-consciousness, and freedom in the *Phenomenology* will point us toward Hegel’s critique of Plato’s politics, which will be treated in an analysis of select passages in the *Philosophy of Right*. Ultimately however, the history of philosophy, the phenomenological account of man’s journey to full self-knowledge, and the practical account of freedom are altogether incomprehensible without reference to Hegel’s dialectical logic, which purports to be the pure conceptual unfolding of the Whole of which history, phenomenology and politics are parts. Accordingly, the final section of the chapter will show how, at the beginning of the Subjective Logic, Hegel claims to provide a definitive conceptual account of self-knowledge which makes possible, at last, the satisfaction of the Platonic quest for wisdom.

Plato in the Hegelian History of Philosophy

Hegel was not party to the garden variety assessment of Plato's intellectual power as entirely insufficient to attain a conception of reflective self-knowledge, interiority, and subjectivity. On the contrary, Plato was, for Hegel, the first great thinker to seek to unify, at the highest possible level, the Greek discovery of *phusis* as rational intelligibility with man's emerging awareness of himself as a self-determining thinker and an agent, an awareness that was already manifesting itself (albeit *in ovo*) in Socrates.⁴ Indeed, the two could hardly be separate for Hegel, since the full revelation of reason's power requires turning inward to investigate the reasoning being itself. This process is already underway in the pre-Socratics but it reaches its first climacteric, prior to modernity, in the Socratic school.⁵ For example, Socrates' demand *vis a vis* traditional Greek ethical life that the Good must be known by the individual, and not merely by

⁴ E, §482A: "The consciousness [of freedom] began with the Greeks, for there it came to pass that Spirit began to come to itself and know itself." Regarding Socrates, see VGP, I, 442, 385-386: "To this determination of the universal, we have, in the second place, to add that this Good, which has by me to be esteemed as a substantial end (*Zweck*), must be known by me; with this the infinite subjectivity, the freedom of self-consciousness in Socrates break out." Cf. also VGP, I 468, 407: on Socrates' "great determination" (albeit in a still merely formal {*formell*} manner) that "consciousness creates and has to create out of itself what is true."

⁵ Of Parmenides Hegel writes that "proper philosophizing" (*eigentliche Philosophieren*) begins with him (VGP, II, 290, 254). It is with Heraclitus, says Hegel that "we first begin to see land"; "there is no proposition of Heraclitus which I have not adopted in my Logic" (320, 279). With Anaxagoras new light dawns, as he is the first to recognize *Verstand* as a principle (369, 319). The text of the *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* has a tangled history which I will not go into here. Unfortunately, while preparing this manuscript I did not have at my disposal a translation based upon critical editions of the *Vorlesungen*. Hence, the English pagination comes from the Haldane-Simson edition, which is based upon the Michelet compilations of 1833-1836, while I have worked with the more critical German version issued by the *Theorie Werkausgabe*. Where there are substantial deviations between the two, the German text is used.

authority and custom, is already a demand grounded in “infinite subjectivity” or the “freedom of self-consciousness”.⁶

Furthermore, even as regards pure theoretical philosophy, or the hypothesis of the Forms, Hegel points to Plato as an “epoch in the history of the world” who achieves the “elevation (*Erhebung*) of consciousness into the realm of spirit” (VGP, II, 12, 2). In light of the absence in Plato of any fully developed doctrine of Absolute Spirit, one might legitimately wonder what Hegel can mean by this elevation. For Hegel, Plato cannot be simply classified as a dualist or enthusiast of the realm of “divine” hyper-uranian Forms. Rather, so Hegel argues, thought and being, or conceptuality and reality, are already conceived as a unity in Plato. This is clearest in the *Meno*, and particularly in the recollection myth, which Hegel regarded very highly. Plato sees that the soul in its highest capacity as *nous* already contains all reality in itself because it contains - or in the language of the dialogue, is linked with – the whole of nature (*phusis hapasa*).⁷ Therefore it is false to say that Plato posits an unbridgeable dualistic chasm between thinking and its object. *Anamnēsis* shows that the object is already in the subject, that learning is not the mechanical reception of something external but the process of *Geist* “becoming its own essence”, discovering that “nothing is for it which is not in itself” (VGP, II, 33, 43-44).

⁶ VGP, I, 443, 386. See also, *ibid*, 391.

⁷ *Meno*, 81d1. *Tês phuseôs hapasês sungennous ousês* refers to the soul as well. Because the soul is *sungennês* with all of nature it has “learned all things”.

This appraisal of Plato remains a Hegelian theme, beginning with the early Jena manuscripts and continuing in the mature works.⁸ Hegel maintained a lifelong admiration for the *Parmenides*, a dialogue which “embraces the whole domain of that [i.e. finite] knowledge through concepts of the understanding (*Verstand*), and destroys it.”⁹ Otherwise stated, Plato had already attained to what Hegel calls the “negative side of the cognition of the Absolute”, because he posits no dogmatic duality between *nous* and *Idea* but rather an immediate relation between them. *Nous* grasps the *noêton eidos* and hence is the locus of truth, not of error. Error is a function of discursive thought (*dianoia*), not of intuition.¹⁰ As such, Plato had already seen far beyond skepticism and dogmatism toward a prefiguring of “Reason” or *Vernunft* in its true speculative aspect.¹¹

What, then, is missing in Plato? Simply put, he lacks a full conception of subjectivity as theoretically and practically *self*-determining. Plato, according to Hegel, does not yet see how the cognitive capacities of man understood as a whole were themselves manifestations of a kind of absolute activity common to both the subject and the object of knowledge.¹² Hence, he did not see that the subjective starting point of philosophy – the philosopher’s own coming-to-self-consciousness and his desire for

⁸ For Hegel’s early treatments of Plato see especially his *Introduction to the Critical Journal* and his *Skepticism* essay. Both are found in fine translations in George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000). All references shall hereafter be to the Introduction essay (CI) or the Skepticism essay (S) followed by the page numbers of the di Giovanni/Harris text.

⁹ S, 323.

¹⁰ Oehler, *Noetischen und Dianoetischen Denken*, 129.

¹¹ S, 323. Cf., Allegra de Laurentiis, *Subjects in the Ancient and Modern World: On Hegel’s Theory of Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 96.

¹² PdG, 38, 36.

knowledge can be transformed into a comprehensive wisdom which is both definitive self-knowledge and knowledge of the whole.¹³

This failure arises from the very same unity of thought and being which Hegel praises in the passages noted above. In Plato, this unity is still static in the following sense: the Ideas are portrayed in the *mythoi* as grasped in an instantaneous (*exaiphnês*) vision. The relationship of the soul to the objects of its desire is not yet “mediated” by passing through the developmental stages of immediate unity, disjunction, and then sublated (*aufgehoben*) reunion. Consequently, the unity of thought and being in Plato is only assumed rather than fully experienced, in the Hegelian sense of experience as a dialectical development. Platonic philosophy lacks *Entzweiung*, the sensation of a rupture or split, which is the precondition for the discovery of the kind of living conceptual motion which is at the heart of Hegel’s system. Plato was indeed the first to comprehend the Absolute but he had not yet grasped its “self-producing activity”, the essentially discursive and dialectical movement of the Concept.¹⁴ This is the sense of Hegel’s statement that “the philosophic culture of Plato, like the general culture of his time was not yet ripe for truly scientific work” (*VGP*, II, 27, 17). This, too, helps to explain the role of myth in the dialogues. In Hegel’s opinion, Plato is forced to express in myth, not something which cannot be expressed discursively (since all philosophical thought is in principle discursive), but something which *he* was not yet in a position to

¹³ See especially, *PdG*, 72, 77.

¹⁴ The reference appears in the Haldane-Simson edition, II, 53. For the corresponding, but different passages in the *Theorie Werkausgabe*, see p. 66ff.

express, namely the Concept. Myth, then, belongs to the pedagogic stage of the human race; philosophically, it is chaff (*VGP*, II, 30, 19-20).

Plato's failure has both theoretical and practical ramifications. On the theoretical side, he remains trapped by the need to preserve the "objective" status of the objects of knowledge in his account of truth. This is accomplished by portraying *nous* as an essentially passive receptivity to forms which are, in some sense, external to it and hence preserved from infection by the motions of thinking. For Plato, the moment of noetic grasp of the Ideas is one in which all subjective self-consciousness is absent. We know the intelligible forms but we do not thereby come to know ourselves. Plato would not of course deny that when we exercise our capacity for knowledge we are aware that we know, but this same capacity cannot be fully and discursively known. There is, then, no developed doctrine of the synthetic unity of apperception in Plato, of the "I" which accompanies and unifies all experience.¹⁵ Rather, Eros, which fuels the ascent of the soul towards the Ideas, is no longer present when *nous* "looks upon Being".¹⁶ For Hegel, passive *nous* is an abstract substance which has not yet become "subject" because it lacks the ability to relate discursively to itself. Hegel provides an unusually clear and succinct statement of the problem in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

¹⁵ For a clear statement of the Hegelian relationship of self-conscious subjectivity to the nature of the Concept itself, cf. *WdL*, 254, 584: "It is one of the deepest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the unity which constitutes the nature of the *Concept* is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, as unity of the 'I think', or of self-consciousness."

¹⁶ This is especially clear at *Phdr.* 247d1-5. When the soul "looks (*idousa*) at Being" there is *agape* but no *eros*.

Nous, simplicity, is substance. On account of its simplicity or self-identity it appears fixed and enduring. But this self-identity is no less negativity; therefore its fixed existence passes over into its dissolution. The determinateness seems at first to be due entirely to the fact that it is related to an *other* and its movement is imposed upon it by an alien power; (*PdG*, 54, 55)

A kind of negative activity is already present in *nous*, then, since it can be any of the forms it thinks – that is, *nous* qua “substance” can be determined differently by the intelligible *eidê* and difference (*Unterschied*), Hegel would insist, simply cannot be conceived without an account of determinate negation (= *omnis determinatio negatio est*). But this negative activity is never made reflexive in Plato. Instead, determinateness is understood, not as produced by thought, but as “imposed upon it by an alien power” (viz., the *eidos*).

If this is the case, however, Plato has not comprehended in a single view the objective (the Whole) and the subjective (the human being qua seeker after the Whole). Instead, he subordinates the subjective moment to the objective, or “divine”, separateness of intelligibility. Plato’s conception of wisdom is fatally undermined by its inability to preserve the moment of subjectivity which was the origin of philosophic activity. It is, after all, the *human being* who desires to know. But in Plato the merely human is negated in favor of the divine.¹⁷ As for the merely “human, all too human”, Socrates says in the *Phaedo* that philosophy is the practice of “dying and be dead”

¹⁷ Stanley Rosen, “Sôphrosunê and Selbstbewusstsein” in *The Ancients and Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine Press, 2002), 106: “The general tendency in the Socratic school is....unmistakable. The subject is fulfilled by transformation into an object.”

(*apothnēskēin te kai tethnānai*).¹⁸ But philosophical life as a preparation for being dead is, for Hegel, radically unsatisfactory. It is not a *human* life in any meaningful sense:

With Plato, philosophy offers the path which the individual must follow in order to attain any knowledge, but generally speaking, Plato places absolute and explicit happiness, the blessed life itself, in the contemplation during life of the divine objects....This contemplative life seems aimless, for the reason that all its *interests* have disappeared. [emphasis mine] (VGP, II, 85-86, 71)¹⁹

As far as practical philosophy is concerned, Plato's failure to see the essential rationality of subjectivity means that he is unable to satisfy the human desire for a well-ordered polity which combines a communal ethical way of life with a recognition of the infinite value and freedom of each individual taken singly. Plato's *Republic* shows that Plato was grappling with, but ultimately unable to incorporate the new principle of subjectivity within Greek ethical life. At Plato's moment in world history, subjectivity could not be grasped otherwise than as a threat to the stability of political life. For the same reasons which underlie his theoretical failure, Plato is unable to see that

¹⁸ *Phd.*, 64a6 and cf. 79d1-e1 on wisdom (*phronēsis*) as the soul's affinity to Form.

¹⁹ Cf. VGP, II, 131, 116: "...the subjectivity of the Concept is lacking throughout but....the substantial Idea forms the principle" [of Plato's philosophy]. Cf. Hegel's treatment of old age in the PSS, 99: In old age, particular subjective interest fades and is eventually lost and this is the disappearance of life. This point is also well put by Kierkegaard who was otherwise ill-disposed to agree with Hegel on anything: "In Diotima's ascent passage, reflection....mounts higher and higher above the atmospheric air until breathing almost stops in the pure ether of the abstract." See, Søren Kierkegaard *Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 41. And cf. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 113: "And in relation to the human World, this System (namely, the Platonic one – A.G.] at best explains "angelic" existence, but deprives historical life, that is man's temporal existence, of any meaning and value." That Plato understood the force of this critique can be seen quite clearly from the *Gorgias*. When Socrates asks whether those "needing nothing" (*hoi mêdenos deomenoi*) are not correctly called happy, Callicles responds: "Well, in that way, stones and corpses would be most happy." *Grg.* 492e3-6.

subjectivity could serve as the mainspring of politics. His *kallipolis* ultimately ends in a tyranny of universality; all particular, individual freedom is “excluded”.²⁰

One can summarize the preceding line of thought as follows: In Plato, and in antiquity generally (since Aristotle, too, is not spared this judgment), man cannot be self-determining and self-grounding. In other words, the Platonic subject cannot be “for itself”, and certainly cannot be “in and for itself” because it does not constitute its object on its own. According to an unpublished Hegelian fragment, Greek antiquity grasped human freedom in a very limited and derivative manner because its concept was of man “as free *within* nature.....as remaining confined within nature...advancing to pure thought only in philosophy but not in religion....being bogged down in what corresponds in thought to immediacy.”²¹ The theoretical and practical dependence of man on nature, then, makes true subjectivity invisible.

The failure goes still deeper, however, and here Hegel levels his most damning charge and the one most germane to our interests. The Platonic Socrates had indeed introduced the principle of subjectivity into philosophy, but because it is as yet too “individual”, “abstract” and not fully self-conscious (for example, Socrates’ experienced his *daimon* as an external authority over which he had no control) it ultimately proved too unstable a basis for the education of the most promising youth in Athens. Socrates’ most brilliant (and therefore most dangerous) students, such as Alcibiades and Critias,

²⁰ VGP, II, 124, 109. Cf. de Laurentiis 141.

²¹ *Ein Fragment zur Philosophie des Geistes* (1822-1825), in M.J. Petry (ed.) *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1978), 93.

lived according to his subjective principle and helped bring about the “ruin of Greek life” (VGP, I, 490, 421). Hegel’s critique proceeds from a point he holds in common with Plato: tyranny is certainly a disease of the soul, but its main symptom is the comprehensiveness of its desire, in this case for ruling over the whole; the tyrant, such as Alcibiades (or Napoleon, for that matter) mistakes a spurious whole, which he can conquer by force of arms, for the true whole which is comprehended in thought. But is there not an uncomfortable similarity to philosophy here? Is it not the evidence of such a comprehensive desire which attracts Socrates to promising and hubristic souls such as Alcibiades? The task of the philosophical teacher, however, is to show the initiate his mistake, to accomplish the turning of the soul, or *periagoge*, from Becoming to true Being. Socrates’ students however, are given intimations of a whole, but no account of how to attain it. As a result, Socrates unwittingly turned his students to tyranny because, while he led them away from the solid ground of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, he lacked the wherewithal for leading to true philosophical satisfaction. He was a corrupter of the youth and “his accusation was therefore just” (VGP, I, 497 426). The accusation against the teacher rebounds upon his greatest student as well. We turn now to those elements of Hegel’s system which are meant to refute the accusation against philosophy by means of the satisfaction of subjectivity.

Phenomenology – Self-Knowledge as Stabilized Desire

Hegel conceives of the satisfaction of subjectivity as a path, or process of development in self-knowledge. Along this path, we will be concerned almost

exclusively with arguing that a single transition within the *Phenomenology*, namely, the emergence of self-consciousness (*Selbstbewußtsein*) in Chapter 4, cannot be correctly interpreted except by reference to Plato's teachings.

Self-consciousness is, in effect, the axis on which the entire work turns. It is the true "hero" whose appearance, as Peter Kalkavage puts it, makes the *Phenomenology* "into a different kind of book."²² Hegel himself marks the importance of the transition by saying that with the emergence of self-consciousness we have "entered the native realm of truth" (*PdG*, 138, 167). The reason for this is quite simple: throughout the first section of the book, Hegel follows the experience of consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) as a detached observer or receptacle (whether perceptual or intellectual) of the given world (*PdG*, 82, 90). Consciousness reflecting upon itself is not yet an explicit theme in the first three chapters. Through the dialectical transformations of consciousness, Spirit learns that it is not a mere viewing which is simply external to the object, but rather that the object is itself penetrated by an absolute restlessness (the play of force and the instability of essence and appearance) and this discovery vitiates the former stance of apprehension (*aufnehmen*). Consciousness discovers that the object, which it thought was true *in-itself*, is in fact true only *for-another*, viz., for consciousness itself. Consciousness is thus thrown back upon itself (*PdG*, 133, 163), and this recoil, or movement inward, is the origin of *self-consciousness*. What follows in Hegel's account is of course well known:

²² Peter Kalkavage, *The Logic of Desire. An Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2007), 91.

Self-consciousness becomes aware of itself within biological life, which is its indispensable substructure. Then, from within the dialectic of life, self-consciousness becomes aware of itself as desire and action. It is only at this moment, however, that the full panoply of subjectivity – the totality of its capacities and manifestations – is for the first time in play. Only now does the *Phenomenology* become a phenomenology of the *whole* human spirit and only now can Hegel reopen the old Platonic question of the nature of the soul, its parts, and its relation to the world. Self-knowledge, then, as identical with the Absolute Knowledge which is reached in Chapter VIII, is the total articulation of the relations among, and unity of, the spiritual faculties which became fully manifest only with the emergence of self-consciousness.²³ Accordingly, while readers of Hegel such as Hyppolite and Kojève are both correct in noting that the pure self-effacement of consciousness before the object in the first sections of the book seems to call to mind the ancient (and Platonic) teaching that the objects of knowledge are given to the soul and not constituted by its activity, one must continue to maintain that the full critique of Plato is only clear once self-consciousness has become an explicit theme. Section A can be said to correspond to certain elements of Plato's teaching (as well as Kant's and any other "incomplete" idealism). In that Section, all activity, difference, and change are posited in the activity of the subject not in the object.

²³ This, I believe, helps explain the anomaly in Hegel's division of the chapter headings. *Bewußtsein* and *Selbstbewußtsein* are clearly marked as two major parts of the Book (A and B, respectively). Part C, famously, has no title, but is divided into four sub-sections (Reason, Spirit, Religion and Absolute Knowledge). Part C is to be understood as unfolding the progress in the dialectical perfection of Self-Consciousness. I owe this insight to Kalkavage's analysis on p. 93.

Thought corresponds to the many or to difference, while the object is believed to be one (=same) and therefore true.²⁴ However, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, Hegel credits Plato with the insight that the object of knowledge, qua intelligible idea, is *within* and not beyond Thought. We must stress again that there is no simple dualism or *Jenseits* in Platonic philosophy, as it is understood by Hegel. What we begin to see in Section B is the enlivening of this One, or object, by the activities of the thinking, which now knows the former to be its own, or within it, or constituted by its own activity. *This* is what Plato failed to see - that activities of the subject or self are knowable because they are a part of the constitution of the object and this is precisely the philosophical transformation from self-consciousness to self-knowledge that we will now endeavor to understand.

Let us turn, then to Chapter IV, titled the "Truth of Self-Certainty" (*Die Wahrheit der Gewißheit seiner selbst*). The key here is to understand exactly what Hegel means by the terms "certainty" and "truth" and how self-consciousness is the "truth of self-certainty". Subjectivity in Hegel, as in Plato, is intrinsically intentional. It is led outside of itself by its very nature. To put this in non-Hegelian terms, every interaction of the soul with the world (including even biological ones, such as eating) involve a claim to knowledge about what the world is and what I, the subject, am. Each such claim is a way of being, a way in which the subject is present and acts in the world. The Hegelian

²⁴ *PdG*, 137, 166: "In the prior modes of certainty, the Truth is, for Consciousness, something other than itself."

subject is not a Cartesian ego which thinks itself as separate from the world and then deduces the structure of experience from the necessity of thinking. On this point, Hegel seems to prefigure Heidegger's existential analysis of *Geworfenheit*: a subject is a subject only in interaction with its world. There is an intrinsic openness in subjectivity. However, it is also true that the subject always meets the world from within a certain "claim" or assertion and, of course, the engine of the *Phenomenology* is precisely the way in which these claims, when brought into contact with the world, when lived to the full, break apart. There is, then, also a certain closed or impermeable aspect to the subject as well (at every stage prior to its identification with Absolute Spirit, that is). This is its certainty, its *Gewißheit*. The subject is certain of itself, of its claim to know and to be, but this certainty remains merely "subjective" until fully justified, or rationally explained. The subject is characterized by the desire to see its certainty prove itself not merely as subjective certainty, but as truth (*Wahrheit*). Experience is the movement from certainty (in the form of this or that *Geistesgestalt*) toward ever more comprehensive truth.

In Chapter IV, however, we have entered a new state of affairs. All attempts to articulate the "truth" of the object by means of sensuous certainty, perception and the dichotomies of the understanding (essence, force, and law) have collapsed or "gone to ground". The true essence or interior of things, the place where the truth was supposed to be found, is now discovered to be the subject itself. The subject steps behind the curtain of appearances to find that on the other side there is no abstract essence or stable

law of nature but himself (*PdG*, 135-136, 165).²⁵ The subject has now come upon “a certainty which is identical with its truth” (*PdG*, 137, 166). If, however, the object has lost its independent essentiality, or truth, Chapter IV begins from the assumption that self-consciousness can no longer be satisfied in theoretical contemplation of the essential constitution of the object or of nature since the truth of that object is a “moment of self-consciousness”, of its restless negative activity (*PdG*, 138, 167). Self-Consciousness is not mere animal self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*), it is an immediate self-certainty of itself as a negating-creating power. But now self-consciousness is concerned with finding this same negative power within external reality, that is, with seeing the truth of its self-certainty. The identity between self-certainty and truth, which arises from the inessentiality of independent nature at the end of Chapter III, is the insight that necessitates a departure from Platonic desire. The essential solipsism of self-consciousness means that it is not open to intelligible nature in the way the ancients had thought. The self can only be opened to the world if its self-certainty is certified. But the only way self-certainty can become truth is by means of being *recognized* as such by another self-conscious living thing. This is first evident in the treatment of the life process in paragraphs 168-173.

The life process is not a demonstration of the biological necessity of a self-conscious organism emerging at some point in the history of organic life on earth. Nor

²⁵ Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, 52-53: When consciousness penetrates through the dialectic of the inverted world it learns that the true essence of nature is not Greek *phusis*, determinate essence or intelligible form, but *life*. Cf., *PdG*, 139, 168

does it purport to explain *how* physical nature becomes so organized as to become self-aware. Instead, it is an explanation of why the life process is logically, or conceptually, insufficient without the emergence of a self-consciousness which both knows this process and manifests itself as an *assertive desire*, a future-oriented desire to transform the world it encounters. As there is no self-consciousness without animal life, self-consciousness now becomes concerned with defining its relationship to this life, whether in the form of its own body, of other bodies, and finally of other embodied selves.

The *Lebensprozess* is on the one hand the undifferentiated and self-differentiating flux (*Flüssigkeit*) of life itself, the “universal medium” from which each enduring thing, each organism, emerges and to which it must eventually return. On the other hand, the process is only a process because of the determinate moments of enduring existence (*Bestehen*) within it, i.e. this or that organism which strives to maintain itself against this flux (*PdG*, 140, 169). In describing the organism Hegel writes:

In the first moment there is the existent shape; as being for itself, or being in its determinateness infinite substance, it comes forward in antithesis to the universal substance, disowns this fluent continuity and asserts (*behauptet sich*) that it is not dissolved in this universal element, but on the contrary preserves itself by separating itself from this its inorganic nature and by consuming it. (*PdG*, 141, 107)

Stated simply, even the very act of consuming food, by which the organism maintains its separate, homeostatic existence is already more than merely organic, it is an *assertion* of separateness, a drive to negate the indeterminate flux through the maintenance of determinacy. What the organism does not know is that the very effort of

maintaining itself as separate merely prepares it for dissolution in the form of sexual reproduction. In maintaining itself, the organism wishes to maintain its “being for self” but the ultimate moment in which the organism can feel its “self-given unity with itself” is the climax of sexual union, which is also the moment at which it fulfills its natural destiny through reproducing another of its own kind (*Gattung*). This is the beginning of its general dissolution (*allgemeine Auflösung*), the first step on the way to its death (*PdG*, 141, 171). In short, the individual living thing has been set up for a fall.

With the conceptualization of reproduction however, our understanding of life is transformed and becomes richer. Life is now understood as the totality of the moments of formation and dissolution, and qua totality it is incorrect to say that all unity always dissolves in flux. Reproduction brings forth the natural kinds, the family lines and the species, which subsist through the *genesis kai phthora* of their individual instances. The existence of subsisting kinds, of universalities which are universal only by means of being instantiated, is the organic precursor to self-consciousness which is also such a universal kind, but one that is come to self-awareness.²⁶ However, emergent self-consciousness knows the life-process and precisely this knowledge throws a wrench into the works. Self-consciousness is a recollection of the whole life-process within itself; now, as self-aware, however, it is no longer willing to be a mere tool which unknowingly fulfills its function in the process only to be discarded. Self-conscious man

²⁶ Hence Hegel describes this new form of life, self-consciousness, as the “für sich selbst *Gattung*” (*PdG*, 143, 173).

is in on nature's sting operation and he is determined to be nobody's fool. And now the same assertiveness that was observed at the organic level returns with a vengeance. Man exists, first, only as a "simple essence" a "pure I" which "has itself for its own object", is concerned only with itself. Man not only stands apart from the universal flux of life (all organisms do this), man now stands *against* life, and views everything as raw material for his creative-destructive power. We can now understand Hegel's statement that, "Self-consciousness is Desire" (*Begierde*). Certain of the nothingness of this other [nature] it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other" (*PdG*, 143, 174).²⁷ Hence, the first step in the encounter of self-consciousness with the living world is *certainty* of itself without any truth in the object, and this manifests itself in a limitless appetite to assimilate into itself (into its abstract unity, or pure "I") every moment of difference (e.g. any and every object which appears to be separate from it). What Hegel means by this is nothing out of the ordinary; it is what we experience in the everyday act of eating.²⁸ However, this initial satisfaction (*Begfriedigung*) proves to be ephemeral, since with each negation of the object, each apple I eat, I merely prepare for desire (hunger) to spring to life anew. This constitutes Hegel's appropriation of the Hobbesian insight that man is essentially limitless appetite.²⁹

²⁷ Cf. *PdG*, 139, 167: "it [self-consciousness] is *Desire* in general".

²⁸ *PdG*, 143, 175: "...self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life."

²⁹ "Life itself," Hobbes teaches, "is motion and it can never be without desire". More accurately, it can never be without the "perpetual and restless desire of power after power that ceaseth only in death." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I, vi, 58 and I, xi, 2.

Many interpreters, and perhaps most convincingly, H.S. Harris, understand this as a critique of Hobbes similar to that of Socrates in his refutation of Calicles in the *Gorgias*.³⁰ The ceaseless desire for power would make a human life – which must be a web of motion *and* rest, stability *and* change – impossible. Desire must be stabilized, but Hobbes' whole psychology of the passions rises and falls with his assertion of the absence of any ultimate *telos* to human activity. Since Plato sets a terminus and *telos* for desire, we would seem to be driven to adopt the Platonic position.³¹ However, the balance of Hegel's analysis will show that Plato (as he understands him) is incapable of providing the stabilizing element because Platonic *eros* suffers from an inverted form of the same fundamental deficiency as Hobbesian appetite.

We have seen that in its search for satisfaction, desire learns that it is "conditioned" by, or dependent upon, the object and hence is unable to truly supersede it, because the act of devouring the object only succeeds in producing anew the need for it (*PdG*, 143-144, 175). The subject is certain of itself, and certain of its desire, but it cannot see itself actualized in the world because of its dependence. It lacks truth.

The same point can be cast in terms of the act of thinking. The subject, qua mere succession of moments of desire, consumption, and satisfaction does not yet truly know the *object* as what it is - i.e. I do not truly penetrate into the inner dialectical structure of

³⁰ Harris, *Hegel's Ladder*, I, 331: "...Hegel follows Plato's lead". And cf., *Grg* 493a7ff on the soul as a "leaky jar".

³¹Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I, xi, 1: ".....We are to consider that the felicity of this life consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis Ultimus* nor *Summum Bonum* as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers."

the apple when I eat it.³² But, in fact, the situation is even more serious: self-consciousness at this stage is also barred from self-knowledge. Why? Because, once we have eaten the apple we have also not *understood* hunger; like the apple, hunger too is extinguished, it is not present to us (until its next appearance, of course). The apple certainly does not recognize me and my right to be satisfied but neither do I understand what the true nature of hunger was and the higher kind of satisfaction to which it points.

It is precisely this problem which affects thinking as understood by Plato. To assume that thinking is satisfied by the reception into itself of the given structure of intelligibility is to make thinking invisible, since at each moment in which the capacity for thought is actualized what is present to us is the determinate object of thought, not the activity of thinking (*PdG*, 54, 34). We may of course be aware that we are thinking, and we may then attempt to describe this awareness and the activity of thinking, but Plato offers no hope of a discursive account of thinking or of the soul as a whole. That is, we find that in Plato we are simply on the reverse side of the same coin. This time there is "truth" in the object (provided that we have grasped "what is" with the part of the soul which is akin to it), but no subjective certainty and this for two reasons: first, because we cannot conceptually grasp our own thinking activity but secondly because Platonic *noēsis* is passive and not active. The subject does not find *itself* in the *noēton*

³² To paraphrase Hegel's language at *WdL II*, 255, 585, the subject does not yet know that in thinking the "I" "pervades" the object.

eidos; it occasionally glimpses the *eidos*, only to fall away again.³³ Because Plato denies the possibility of man becoming wise, we find the same *schlechte Unendlichkeit* of desire, ephemeral satisfaction and renewed desire, which makes a mockery of philosophy.³⁴ Platonic man may be self-conscious and perhaps even self-reflexive to a degree, Platonic eros cannot be. Or, as Kojève points out,

....the analysis of "thought", "reason", "understanding" and so on – in general, of the cognitive, contemplative, passive behavior of a being or a "knowing subject" – never reveals the why or how of the birth of the word "I" and consequently of self-consciousness – that is, of human reality. The man who contemplates is "absorbed" by what he contemplates; the "knowing subject" loses himself in the object that is known.³⁵

In other words, we are literally slipping through our own fingers.

For Hegel, the only way around this problem is straight through it. Truth must become precisely what the title of the chapter tells us it is – the truth of self-certainty; self-consciousness must make its *subjective certainty* true in the world and this means that we must leave behind the conception of desire only as an absence, or lack, which is filled by a presence (the object). We must make desire fully knowable on its own as both an absence and a presence. Thinking must make the activity of thought – rather than only of the objects of thought – available to it for reflection.³⁶

Of course, one might simply respond by admitting the diagnosis while denying that the proposed cure, full self-knowledge, is possible. But for Hegel such an admission

³³ *Phdr*, 247b5ff.

³⁴ Cf. *PdG*, 184, 238. For a logical analysis of spurious infinity, see *W.d.L.*, 152, 139.

³⁵ Kojève, 3.

³⁶ Cf. *E*, §552R.

would equal the abandonment of philosophy. Self-consciousness “*must* experience satisfaction, for it is the truth” (*PdG*, 143, 175).³⁷ To believe in the possibility of philosophy as love of wisdom without believing in the possibility of actually *becoming* wise is as senseless, in the words of one scholar, “as engaging in eating without believing in the possibility of satiety.”³⁸ The whole case must be thought anew. We must stabilize desire in order to make self-knowledge possible.

This stabilization is achieved in two steps. Hegel begins by deepening the modern philosophical shift in emphasis from the object of desire to the faculty of desiring itself. In antiquity the central problematic had been to ascertain the natural perfection of human nature, such that in its attainment desire, or human incompleteness, is fulfilled and transcended. For Hegel, however, the question is a different one. In attempting to unite inner certainty of subjective experience with truth as the actualization of that experience, it is not enough for the object to be merely negated or “eaten” by me, as the apple is. Nor is it sufficient for the object of intellection to be present to *noēsis*. I need to *recognize* myself in the object and be recognized by it.³⁹ But

³⁷ Cf. *VGP* i, 65, 46: “Spirit demands knowledge of itself.”

³⁸ *De Laurentiis*, 20. Cf., *PdG*, 14, 5: “To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title “love of knowing” and be *actual* knowing - that is what I have set myself to do.” In the same paragraph, Hegel calls *Wissenschaft* the inner necessity of knowing. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 983a11ff: “However, it is necessary that the acquisition of this science must bring us to the contrary state to the one from which we began the inquiries.”

³⁹ Kojève, 4: The man who is “absorbed” by the object that he is contemplating can be ‘brought back to himself’ only by a Desire.”

the only object which can recognize the superior right of my desire is one which is itself shot through with subjective life; it too must be conscious and alive.⁴⁰

Hence, "a self-consciousness exists only for another self-consciousness...for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it" and "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*". The object of desire has become recognition by another desire.⁴¹ Desire is, in this sense, the end for the sake of which we desire anything whatsoever.⁴²

Now we are prepared for the second step. In the meeting of two self-consciousnesses, desire is transformed from mere negation or absence, into *activity* (the precursor in the realm of human spirit of the negative activity of the Concept) but this transformation is effected not through a broadening of the contemplative horizon, but through mortal struggle and transformative labor. That is, for Hegel *eros* can only become fully rationalized through a radical revision in the role of what Plato would have called *thumos*, or spiritedness.

In the *Republic*, *thumos* is the middle part of the soul, different from both the calculating (*logistikon*) and the desiring part (*ephithumetikon*), but able to be an ally of

⁴⁰ PdG, 143-144, 175. See also, 144, 176: "The satisfaction of Desire is, it is true, the reflection of self-consciousness into itself, or *the certainty that has become truth*. (c) But the truth of this certainty is really a double reflection, *the duplication of self-consciousness*. Consciousness has for its object one which, of its own self, posits its otherness or difference as a nothingness and in so doing is independent." [emphases mine]

⁴¹ Kojève, *Lectures*, 5.

⁴² Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV, Def. 7: "By the *end* for the sake of which we do something, I mean *appetite*". Cf., also III, P9S: "This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man....."

logos (*summachon tōi logōi*) against the desires.⁴³ It is associated with war, with boiling anger and with conquest and *philonikia*, the love of victory. It is not intrinsically rational, since it is shared by beasts and children, but it does “hearken to reason”.⁴⁴ Thumos makes possible the work of reason in two ways, first through mastery of the lower, “epithumotic” desires and secondly through being the source of high personal ambition which often attends the most developed philosophical natures.⁴⁵ However, to the extent that a man does not transcend his “thumoeidetic” concern with himself and his reputation, and hence with the recognition which he receives from others, he cannot become a philosopher. *Thumos* is a necessary helpmeet to the work of reason, but it is not itself rational work because it does not posit its own ends (=values), but receives them from reason.

In Hegel *thumos* becomes *internal* to the structure of rational activity. This is encapsulated in a summary fashion in Hegel’s explanation of why violence and the mortal struggle for honor is a necessary moment of spiritual activity “....it is only through staking one’s life (*Daransetzen des Lebens*) that freedom is won” (*PdG*, 148, 187). This is to be interpreted as follows: The struggle for recognition is not, when fully comprehended, a mere expression of idiosyncratic self-assertion and urge for mastery. The truth is the reverse. Idiosyncratic self-assertion is the phenomenological

⁴³ *Republic* 439e4

⁴⁴ *Timaeus* 70a1-b1.

⁴⁵ That this is true is hinted at, among other places, in the *Republic* where Socrates mentions the case of a young man of “great soul” (*megalê psuchê*) and ambition born into the straitened provinciality of a small city (496b4).

manifestation of how subjectivity externalizes or actualizes itself, namely, by imposing its forms on the objective world and thereby transforming the merely given (*Das Gefundene*). And in this sense it is a precursor to the externalization of the Absolute Idea within nature, which is the condition for the possibility of Spirit being with itself, finding only itself in the world and being thereby truly free.⁴⁶

Hegel gives a logical account of the life and death struggle in paragraphs 178-187. Since self-consciousness exists in and for itself only through existing for another, it presupposes a duality of moments, moments which “must be held strictly apart” – that is, violence and negativity emerge from the necessary duality of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness must then find and overcome itself in the other. But since each moment of self-conscious aims to do the same thing, to supersede (*aufheben*) the other, each self-conscious moment is simultaneously a quantum of force and resistance. To become at home in the world does not involve using reason to follow and articulate clearly the joints within the intelligible structure of nature (though it is also this); initially it involves the application of force to shatter the resistance of this living structure before

⁴⁶ For a very interesting early example of how Hegel understood the activity of externalizing Spirit in nature, one should examine his youthful attempts at a dialectical theology of the Eucharist in *Leben Jesu*. There, the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is a spiritualization – the mere matter of experience (this wafer and this wine) are totally transformed from what they appear to be to what they are “in truth” for the believer, i.e. the actual presence of Christ in the Eucharist (*Hoc est enim corpus meum. Hoc est enim calix sanguinis mei*). This actuality is a product of the activity of Spirit, not a merely material or natural transformation. In fact, there is *no* natural transformation that the eye can see. This is precisely the point of the dogma of *mysterium fidei*. The Eucharist is an example, in religious representational thinking, of the essential process of the subject’s externalization which is to be comprehended speculatively. More on the Eucharist in Lutheran vs. Catholic worship can be seen at *E*, §552R. See Löwith’s excellent analysis of this at *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 329.

me, to *transform* it, first into a corpse, and then (when this is found to be obviously unsatisfactory from the point of view of his recognizing me) into a living slave. Hence, only if we unite reason, *thumos* and *eros* into a single theoretical-productive power do we unite certainty and truth: "They must engage in this struggle for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth" (*PdG*, 148, 178). We now begin to see one of the ways in which the *Phenomenology* points forward toward the *Logic*. The whole of Hegel's system is an attempt to work out the complete discursive justification of the unity of theoretical and practical faculties which begins in the struggle for recognition and the master-slave dialectic.

But what, exactly, does any of this have to do with freedom? And how does freedom relate to self-knowledge? This becomes clearer in thinking about the dialectic of passivity and activity in each of the shapes that results from the struggle for recognition. The thumotic expenditure of force results in one pure self-consciousness (*reines Selbstbewußtsein*), who is only for himself but passive (the master) and another who is purely for another, but active (the slave) (*PdG* 150, 189). As is well known, however, the crucial moment of the dialectic is the slave, not the master. The master's desire is to become real in the world through being recognized, a recognition which is accomplished by the slave's negation of his own desire through its subordination to the fulfillment of the master's wishes. But the master, in having achieved the negation of the independent desire of the slave, slips back into a passive receptivity to the fruits of the latter's labor. *Thumos* seems to have negated itself in reaching its goal since the

original desire for recognition was inseparable from assertiveness or activity. Now however, all *Arbeit*, has shifted to the domain of the slave. Since Spirit must be both understanding and doing, we see immediately that the master is a spiritual dead end.⁴⁷

One might say that, for Hegel, Plato remains at the level of the master. The Platonic philosopher, in his concern with knowing the truth about the natural order which is higher than man has transcended his need for other human beings. He sees them *sub specie aeternitatis* as “playthings of the gods”, but the result is that there is now nothing left for *him* to *do* qua this individual here.⁴⁸ We remember Hegel’s comment about how all particular “interest” has disappeared in Platonic contemplation.

For Hegel, by contrast, the slave is crucial because he experiences three moments which the master does not: fear (*Furcht*), service (*Dienst*) and work (*Arbeit*). These together will cause a deepening and an interiorizing (*in sich gehen*) of the slave and his transformation into a “truly independent consciousness” (*PdG*, 152, 193). Fear deepens self-consciousness through forcing it to face death, the Absolute Master, and thereby to experience the sheer liquefaction and inessentiality of everything it previously believed to be stable; but this liquidity is identical with absolute negativity which is “pure being for self” (*PdG*, 153, 194). The slave is on his way toward the Absolute. In service, the

⁴⁷ Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 174. Cf., Kojève, 20: “History is the history of the working slave.”

⁴⁸ *Leg.* 803cff: “I assert that what is serious should be treated seriously and what is not serious should not and that by nature god is worthy of a complete, blessed seriousness, but that what is human, as we said earlier, has been devised as a certain plaything of god, and that this is really the best thing about it.” And cf. *Leg.* 644d on man as the “divine puppet.”

slave learns to negate his own natural desires, to replace them with the desires of another. He thereby learns to rise above them and be free of his merely natural self.

Work, however, is the crucial moment. Through the necessity of working for the master in order to survive, the slave learns the deeper truth of the thumotic desire for recognition, namely that only when self-consciousness produces, when it negates the mere immediacy of the object through impressing its own form upon it, does it truly recognize itself.⁴⁹ Work for Hegel is relation to, or engagement with the world. It is the process whereby subjectivity becomes in fact free by releasing itself from the appearance that rationality is external, or in the object.⁵⁰ In the slave, Hegel achieves the broadening of self-consciousness through action, rather than mere contemplation.⁵¹

However, contemplation is not simply thrown aside. The next step is for self-consciousness to understand that thinking is work which shares the same characteristic of negative activity as the physical work of the slave, but is, in fact, truly *free*. The slave is not yet capable of this (*PdG*, 156, 120), but he sets the stage for it through his

⁴⁹ Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 265ff has an excellent discussion of how work universalizes Spirit, as does Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, 70ff. And cf. Kojève, 25: "Only after producing an artificial object is man himself really and objectively more than and different from a natural being; and only in this real and objective product does he become conscious of subjective human reality."

⁵⁰ *PSS*, 204: "It is only an appearance that rationality is at first something existing 'out there' and is not the intelligence's own rationality. This appearance is to be worked off."

⁵¹ This is shown quite well in Hegel's analysis of dementia as a kind of breakdown of the capacity of spirit to relate to the world outside it. For this reason, work plays a crucial role in Hegel's conception of psychic therapy for severe "spiritual" illness. See *PSS*, 150: "The first point is that one seeks to occupy the demented outside of their dementia; through some other interest one seeks to engage them in work. To work means to become interested in a cause, to *become interested in a cause outside subjectivity*." [emphasis mine]

transformation into the Stoic, who is, for Hegel, the first free self-consciousness, free because he for the first time absolutizes thinking (*PdG*, 157, 198).

For our purposes, then, the slave is an especially suggestive *Geistesgestalt* because he exemplifies, *in utero*, the unity of theory and practice which is so crucial to Hegel's whole system and to his relation to Plato and this prepares our transition to Hegel's political philosophy, which turns on the relation of self-knowledge to rational practical life, the essence of which is freedom. Freedom, in Hegelian philosophy, means having oneself for one's own object while not being an object of anything more comprehensive. It is both the liberation of Spirit from nature *and* the definition of full self-knowledge, understood as "comprehensive cognition" (*begreifendes Erkennen*).⁵²

The further step which Hegel takes is to insist that self-knowledge in the individual is also the ground of the possibility of a rational arrangement of the communal realm. In one sense the case in Hegel, then, is just as it is in Plato: the character of the regime has its origin in the human beings who are its authors and subjects.⁵³ The question which divides them is whether full self-knowledge is the ground of political freedom or transcends it. Hegel's assessment of Platonic philosophy on this point is found in the *Philosophy of Right*.

⁵² *E*, §442A and §160A. The Concept is completely transparent to itself, *knows* itself, and hence is free because it grasps all determinations, but is not in turn grasped by, or unfolded from within, anything more complete. Cf. *E*, §160.

⁵³ *R*, 435eff and 544d6-e2.

Self-Knowledge and Practical Reason

The *Philosophy of Right* as a whole is based upon freedom as an essential determination of the will and, by extension, of Spirit. In this work, the entire system of rights and duties, of practical ethics, is deduced from freedom or rather *is* “the realm of actualized freedom” (*PR*, §4A).⁵⁴ Actualized freedom in Hegel’s unique sense is not merely “the absence of obstacles to doing as we like, whether our choices are good or bad, rational or arbitrary” as Allen Wood aptly phrases the traditional liberal understanding.⁵⁵ Freedom cannot, in other words, refer only to the absence of external restraint imposed by others. As we have seen in the *Phenomenology*, it can only mean that one overcomes the opposition between self and other (whether this other is some other individual or the collective itself). Accordingly, political freedom is possible only within a comprehensive, and comprehensively rational, social-ethical order (*Sittlichkeit*) in which the relationship of restraining and restrained is replaced by the more organic relation of parts (*citizens*) of a whole (*Staat*). Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* encompasses those rights which cut a broad path for the free exercise of man’s idiosyncratic subjectivity (by means of private property, freedom of choice in occupation, freedom of religious worship, etc) along with concrete duties and institutions (the corporations or guilds, for example) which bring him into relation with his fellows in such a way that he identifies those institutions and duties as his own, as emerging from and concordant with his own

⁵⁴ Cf. *PSS*, 264: “...the substance of Spirit is freedom.”

⁵⁵ *PR*, xiii.

rational will (*Wille*) by virtue of their rationality. This is what is described in the *Phenomenology* as “The I that is We and the We that is I” (*PdG*, 145, 177) and it is only within such a social order that Spirit can be at home with itself. It is this kind of ethical life which is the “motivating end” (*Zweck*) (*PR* §142) of Spirit in its practical aspect (“objective Spirit”).⁵⁶

Accordingly, correctly interpreting the critique of Plato in the *Philosophy of Right* requires noting that, just like Plato, Hegel does not place absolute value on individuality or particularity as such, on *this* person with his own idiosyncratic drives, desires, etc. (*PR*, §35). The essence of personality is rather the overcoming of its own limitations and this is also the essence of self-knowledge, of “self-consciousness which comprehends itself as essence.”⁵⁷ This self-knowledge, says Hegel, is the ground of right (*PR*, §21). It is, however, only in the *modern* state, described in Part III of the work, that self-knowledge comes into its fullest expression; only the modern state can lay justified claim to being the “image of eternal reason” (*PR*, §272).

And yet, Hegel equivocates on the degree to which modernity is unprecedented in this respect. On the one hand, he writes that “the principle of the modern world at large is “freedom of subjectivity” (*PR*, §273A) and the philosophical comprehension of subjectivity is “later than the Greek world” (*PR*, §185). It is the “pivot or focal point

⁵⁶ See *E*, §385.

⁵⁷ See *PR*, §129A: “...even the ‘I’ as personality is already the Idea, but in its most abstract shape.” And cf., §132: “....the nature of the human being consists precisely in the fact that he is essentially universal in character....”

(*Wende und Mittelpunkt*) of the difference between antiquity and the modern age” which entered man’s consciousness only with the advent of Christianity (PR, §124).⁵⁸ On the other hand, however, we are told in the Preface that already in pre-Christian antiquity, Plato had become “aware that the ethics of his time were being penetrated by a deeper principle” which would be the “hinge (*Angel*) on which the impending world revolution turned” (PR, 20). This deeper principle was the “drive” or “unsatisfied longing” for “free infinite personality” (PR, *ibid*), that is, for the very principle of subjective freedom and self-determination which is so characteristic of modernity. As other passages in the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Vorlesungen* make clear, the reference is to Socrates. Socrates inaugurates subjective freedom through his insistence that the individual actively choose his ends himself (PR, §104-105). He exemplifies “the tendency to look inwards into the self and know and determine from within....what is right and good....in epochs when what is recognized as right and good in actuality and custom is unable to satisfy the better will.” Socrates comes on the scene “at the time when Athenian democracy had fallen into ruin. He evaporated the existing world and retreated into himself....” (PR, §138A).⁵⁹ Socrates, then, is both a son of his time and a revolution of the spirit which eventually gives birth to our age; a modern *avant de la lettre*.

⁵⁸ On Christianity as the axial moment of the appearance of free subjectivity, see PR, §62 and 124.

⁵⁹ The treatment of Socrates at 138A appears mostly in the *Zusatz*, which is of course not Hegel’s text, but Gans’ compilation of the notes taken by Hegel’s students, Hotho and Griesheim. Accordingly, the *Zusätze* need to be treated with the caution due to their ambiguous philological citizenship. However, the texts of the relevant *Zusätze* I will be discussing here accord with and express quite well the teaching contained in the sections and remarks which are entirely Hegel’s

Plato is aware of and tries to grapple with the huge dynamic working itself out in his teacher but he is ultimately unable to do it justice. Hegel's account of this failure is given, in the main, at two points in the text, the Preface and Section 185.⁶⁰ We begin with the more condensed treatment of the *Preface*:

own. Hence, they seem to me, at least, to represent an accurate and conscientious rendering of his thought on these points; or at least, there is nothing in them which diverges from Hegel's *stated* teachings in the *PR*. The holds true for the *Zusätze* to the *Encyclopedia* as well, and I believe that a persuasive case has been made in this regard by Geraets, Harris and Suchting in their preface to the Hackett English translation of the *Encyclopedia Logic* (see especially pgs., vii-viii). I will address, in footnotes, any cases where I find the situation to be otherwise.

⁶⁰ For an assessment of Hegel's relation to Plato which differs in important respects from my own, see Michael B. Foster, *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965). Foster attempts to show both that Hegel transcends Plato through his incorporation of subjective freedom into the lives of all citizens of the state while also pointing out this transcendence is ultimately only terminological and not essential (p. 194). Both thinkers are finally consigned by Foster to the pre-Christian purgatory on account of their failure to incorporate the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* or truly free will. Foster's book is extremely interesting and perceptive. I believe, however, that he is wrong on the decisive details. I restrict myself here to a few remarks: (i) Foster's interpretation of the *Republic* is hamstrung by his adherence to the orthodoxy according to which the tripartite partition of the soul and the city is Platonic dogma and represents something like a form or Idea of *Dikaionês* of the city and soul which is impressed (by the philosopher-kings) onto the hylic matter of the actual city or the individual soul (p. 16). He fails to notice how both the argument and the action of the *Republic* serve to undermine this rigid tri-partition, thus showing how Plato himself points beyond the limitations of his city-soul analogy. For Foster, any such moments in the text are simply evidence of Plato's "confused" (p.28-29) perception that all was not well in *Kallipolis*, a perception he could not capitalize on without transforming himself into a Hegelian (p. 57). I would also point out that nowhere does Plato say that there is an "idea" of the *polis*. With all due respect to Socrates' telegraphic statement about a "pattern" of a city "*perhaps (isôs) laid up in heaven*" (*en ouranôi...paradeigma*) (592b2), the natural or artificial status of the *polis* is left purposely ambiguous by Plato; (ii) Foster criticizes what he sees as Hegel's failure to truly unify theory and practice. Instead, he claims, practice is ultimately subordinated to theory because Hegel remains wedded to the essentially Greek doctrine of praxis as *technê*, or action in accordance with the grasp of a preexisting *telos*, a form or essence to be actualized, which is not itself a product of activity (p. 128ff). Hegel, for Foster, simply translates this doctrine into his *Begriff*, since the *Begriff* is the full articulation of its necessary, non-created, moments. It is developmental but not genuinely creative. My response is that this is true in Hegel, but not because Hegel fails to do justice to the doctrine of creation. The Absolute Idea is *creative* in that it is the form-producing, negative activity present in each determinate form. What there is *not* in the Hegelian Absolute is

.....Plato's *Republic*, a proverbial example of an *empty ideal*, is essentially the embodiment of nothing other than the nature of Greek ethics (*Sittlichkeit*); and Plato, aware that the ethics of his time were being penetrated by a deeper principle, which within this context could appear immediately only as an yet unsatisfied longing and hence only as a destructive force, was obliged, in order to counteract it, *to seek the help of that very longing itself* [emphasis mine]. But the help he required had to come from above, and he could seek it at first only in a particular *external* form of Greek ethics. By this means, he imagined he could overcome the destructive force, and thereby inflicted the deepest wound [*am tiefsten verletzt*] on the deeper drive behind it, namely free infinite personality. But he proved himself to be the great spirit by the fact that the very principle on

spontaneity, understood as randomness or activity not subordinated to the necessary structure of conceptual logic. Foster asserts the philosophical necessity of going beyond Hegel on this point, but to my mind he nowhere proves this. This leads me to the main thrust of Foster's argument, which is (iii) that both Hegel and Plato remain ultimately "Greek" because of their failure to incorporate the Christian doctrine of Creation. As far as I can see, Foster's work rests on the presupposition that the doctrine of Creation - as activity which is not teleological (governed by a priori theoretical grasp of essence) but self-grounding - is an "advance" on the Greek and Hegelian accounts of the relationship of intellection and desire to their objects. He insists on this at several points in the text (132-140 *in passim*). His work also rests on the further assumption that historicism is superior to, and a liberation from, the view of nature as the order of *ratio essendi*, by means of which reason judges the phenomena or appearances of man's historical activity. Hegel was not able to attain to this fully self-conscious historicism because the *Begriff*, while not static, is eternal (166). Foster thus combines what he calls the "truth" and "superiority" of Christian creation, on the one hand, with the "truth" and "superiority" of historicism on the other. Unfortunately, this unstable combination is destined to blow apart. The main point is that even if this superiority were granted, we still require an explanation of how to distinguish the freedom of non-teleological creative activity from randomness. Secondly, and more fatally for Foster's position, the finality of the Christian revelation of God's essence as free will presumes an absolute moment from which its superiority and completeness as revelation becomes visible - since otherwise we are open to the obvious difficulty of a *regressio ad infinitum*, or more precisely a *progressio* which is not unlike Hegel's bad infinity: perhaps the future holds a more complete revelation of the truth of the divine nature than the Christian one? If the Christian doctrine of free volition is true of God, then we are thrown back on the assertion that Christianity has articulated the *essence* of God (as unlimited practical efficacy), but in this case we are speaking the language - not of history as the *non plus ultra* of all theoretical and practical judgment - but of the intellectual apprehension of essence (i.e. essence as an activity or *energeia*). In other words, we are back to speaking Greek again, either in its Platonic-Aristotelian or Hegelian dialects. Christianity may very well be the origin of historicism by virtue of its commitment to the doctrine of God's unfathomable *decision* to create the world at a particular moment in time (as Foster insists at 174n and esp. Chapter VI *in passim*) and because it views human history as having a meaning or trajectory embodied in the movement from Creation through Incarnation to Last Judgment. But if so, Christianity is a mother which devours its own young.

which the distinctive character of his Idea turns is the hinge on which the impending world revolution turned. (PR, 20)

Hegel expands on this theme at §185:

Plato, in his *Republic*, presents the substance of ethical life in its ideal *beauty* and *truth*; but he cannot come to terms with the principle of self-sufficient particularity, which had suddenly overtaken Greek ethical life in his time, except by setting up his purely substantial state in opposition to it and completely excluding, from its very beginnings, *private property* and the *family* to its subsequent development (*Ausbildung*) as the arbitrary will of individuals and their choice of social position. This deficiency also explains why the great *substantial* truth of his *Republic* is imperfectly understood, and why it is usually regarded as a dream of abstract thought.⁶¹

Both passages are perplexing. If Plato sought to oppose, counteract or overcome subjectivity, how can he also be said to have made it the “very principle on which the distinctive character of his Idea turns”? And if he sought the very help of that principle itself, how is it possible to understand the *Republic* as nothing other than an ideal embodiment of the very Greek ethical system to which such subjective inwardness was fundamentally alien? Plato is said to have inflicted the “deepest wound” on the longing for free infinite personality and yet we are told that there was a “great substantial truth” in his *Republic*, that is, that he was in some sense correct in trying to oppose the disintegrative power of the Socratic spirit. Is the *Republic* merely “substantial” in Hegel’s sense of this word (that is, one-sidedly objective and lacking in the principle of free subjectivity) or is it already subjective, in some embryonic sense?

⁶¹ The translation here is substantially that of Allen Wood, with minor modifications of my own.

An attempt to answer these questions must begin by noting the location of Hegel's discussions of Socrates and Plato. The most extensive treatments of Socrates occur in Part II of the work, titled Morality (*Moralität*). Morality is the *penultimate* stage in the unfolding of objective Spirit. It is the spiritual stance in which the individual will demands its rights (*PR*, §107) positing itself and only itself as universal, as the source of moral obligation and value. However, as a will which now chooses its own ends (rather than, for example, accepting the authority of tradition and custom) it is not yet fully concrete since, at this stage, it has only the demand of self-legislation without the fully rational content. That content can only arrive once we reach Part III (*Sittlichkeit*). Thus, morality is not mere personal whim; it is indeed directed toward and seeks to ground itself in reason. However, as always in Hegel, the transition between the conceptual joints within the system is neither arbitrary nor interchangeable. No shape of spirit can overleap its own moment and become something more than it is. Morality is still "sheer restless activity which cannot yet arrive at something that is" (*PR*, §108A). Socrates, is identified as a "shape" of this restless activity and more specifically as conscience (*Gewissen*), "the absolute entitlement of subjective self-consciousness to know *in itself* and *from itself* what right and duty are" (*PR*, §137). Conscience is the subjective moment within morality; it appears on the scene when all "previously valid determinations have vanished and the will is in a state of pure inwardness" (*PR*, §139), that is, when the entire structure of ethical obligations of a society has been shaken to the core and lost its self-evident validity. At this point, the subject is forced inward, not away from the

moral good as such (which is always the goal) but away from the moral good as actualized. The good now becomes a project to be achieved in the future, an “ought-to-be” (*Sollen*)(*PR*, §131) constituted not by something external, like the traditions of one’s community, but only within thought.

Not for nothing does Hegel repeatedly describe the activity of conscience with the verb *verflüchtigen* which means both to evaporate and to volatize (as one would a gas). Conscience sets in motion what had seemed previously stable by making it go up in smoke. It is quite an ambiguous affair, then. When it privileges the arbitrary particularity of the individual, conscience is identified as the source of evil, to which it can turn “at any moment” (*PR*, §139). Socrates is experienced by his contemporaries as a force of destruction and negation. He upends the structure of that unreflective Greek ethical life rooted in the “unwritten and secure laws of the gods which are not of today or yesterday, but live forever, and no one knows when they appeared.”⁶²

It is noteworthy that Socrates as portrayed in the *Philosophy of Right* is exclusively a practical thinker. No mention is made of any theoretical interests in the “things in the heavens and under the earth”. In this regard, Hegel’s Socrates is strikingly similar to the latter’s own self-assessment in the *Apology*, which would seem to suggest that the problem in Plato is primarily a practical one: an inability to make room within his

⁶² *Antigone*, 454-457.

political thought for the freedom of individual will.⁶³ I do not believe this to be the case. Closer examination will reveal that the emphasis on the practical element of Socrates already contains the theoretical within it.

How, then, did Plato try to counteract the longing represented by Socrates using that very longing itself? A very suggestive answer is given by Richard Velkley:

That Plato sought a corrective to the longing “by means of the longing itself” suggests that he used the figure of Socrates to correct Socrates’ own thinking. Thus the *Republic* presents Socrates as a (not wholly willing) teacher of ethical life and his philosophical longing or *eros* is put in the service of forming laws and customs to counteract the acid effect of dialectic.⁶⁴

In making reason (in the person of Socrates) the legislator of the *kallipolis*, Plato tries to satisfy the demands of *Moralität* and *Gewissen* for self-legislated norms (*Recht*) instead of merely “naturally intuited” custom. *Sittlichkeit* will now no longer be externally “given”, it will be the product of reflective, practical volition.⁶⁵ Why, then,

⁶³ *Ap.* 19c8-d5. However, one would do well to note that in the *Apology*, Socrates does not deny that he might investigate the things in the heavens and under the earth. He denies only that he has any knowledge of them or that any Athenian juror would have heard him conversing about them *in public*. Richard Velkley remarks on the practical, and even “willful” nature of Hegel’s Socrates. See Richard Velkley, “On Possessed Individualism: Hegel, Socrates’ Daimon, and the Modern State,” *Review of Metaphysics* 59 (March 2006): 582-583 and especially his remark on the affinity of Hegel’s Socrates to Kant.

⁶⁴ Velkley, *Possessed Individualism*, 586.

⁶⁵ See *R.* 378e.7-379a4 and 398b3. This is true even for the sacred rites in the city, “the greatest, and most beautiful and first things among the laws which are given” such as the founding of temples, and religious and funerary rituals. Socrates tells Adeimantus that these things should not be the products of innovation by the founders, but that they should make use of “make use of no interpreter other than the ancestral one” (*tôi patriôi*) (*R.*, 427b2-c4). It is obvious however, that the decision of what to relegate to the ancestral and what not is a legislative act. The ancestral has its status in the city not through itself, but through the *decision* of the founders. All further references to the *Republic* in this chapter shall be made parenthetically in the text. References to other Platonic dialogues will be duly noted.

does Plato's city remains merely "substantial" even though it originates in this "subjective" self-legislation? Hegel gives us the following hint: According to the *Philosophy of Right*, ethical life in the ancient city-states, no matter its precise form of organization (patriarchal, religious, aristocratic or republican), was "based on original natural intuition". He does not elaborate on the meaning of this except to say that natural intuition was unable "to withstand the division which arose....as self-consciousness became infinitely reflected into itself" (PR, §185). We are to understand that the natural basis of the *polis* is somehow unable to accommodate a certain level of flux in the differentiation of its social parts. The original natural intuition which grounded Greek *Sittlichkeit* was what Hegel would call an "abstract" unity, without an adequate articulation of its parts. We shall see that for all its innovation, Socrates' legislation remains within the compass of "natural" Greek spirit.

The key is, again, the location of our crucial section 185. It appears near the beginning of the treatment of Civil Society (*Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*). According to Hegel, civil society is that social sphere which is intermediate "between the family and the state" (PR, §182A). Its animating principle is the individual's attempt to satisfy his private, essentially limitless needs and desires (what Plato might call the *epithumiai*) through work, the progress of commerce, arts, useful sciences and transactions with all other individuals similarly engaged in the selfish realization of the complete system of their subjective needs, their *System der Bedürfnisse*. "Each individual is his own end and all else means nothing to him" (PR, §182A). Civil society is the capitalist market in its

fullest sense, the “spectacle of extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both” (*PR*, §185). Although civil society seems like particularity run amok, it in fact serves as the crucial middle term which mediates between adamant selfishness of Hobbes’ or Rousseau’s solitary man and the universality of concrete ethical life. In working to satisfy his private desires, man learns that he can gain his satisfaction only through others who are – and this is absolutely crucial – not bound to him by the immediate, “natural” ties of blood and familial affection. He is dependent on these others, he must satisfy them, or at least take some interest in their welfare if he in turn is going to be satisfied (as is obvious in even the simplest business transaction: the creditor inevitably finds himself praying for the well-being of the debtor, so long as the debt is not discharged). Civil society is the great school of individuality, where it is educated (*gebildet*) into its dependence on the essentially relational character of the universal (*PR*, §187). Individuality is passing over to the form of universality (*PR*, §186).⁶⁶ Civil society highlights again the close link between *work* and the total activity of liberated spirit. We must work off our simple individuality through willful activity. In the satisfaction of need, we are not dealing with something entirely separated and distinct from the subjective inwardness of conscience, which is represented in the exalted moral standpoint of Socrates or Kant. Rather we are watching one of its first (albeit lower) manifestations in the process of

⁶⁶ As Hegel puts it, in civil society “*particularity*” is given “the right to develop and express itself in all directions” while universality proves “itself both as the ground and necessary form of particularity and as the power behind it and its ultimate end” (*PR*, §184).

being mediated, or transformed into something higher. *This* mediating activity is precisely what Hegel believes to be missing in Greek ethics in general and in the *Republic* particularly. Civil society is a spiritual possibility which is unique to the modern world (*PR*, §182A); it is, indeed, the secret of its strength.

The principle of particularity is hardly absent from the *Republic* of course. It is already present when Socrates says that the city originates in man's mutual dependence or need (*chreia*) for others to satisfy even the basic requirements of his own individual existence (369c10). It comes on the scene most dramatically in the undermining of the first, rustic city founded by Socrates and Adeimantus. The *kallipolis* has its roots in Glaucon's desires for relish, for a human as opposed to the merely swinish life provided for the citizens of the first city (372c2-e1). The new "fevered" city which emerges opens up the whole higher realm of human life – luxury, the arts and glory (which arises only with the possibility of war) none of which were of any moment in the "healthy" city. Needless to say, philosophy, too, is possible only in the fevered city, since Socrates would starve to death straight away in Adeimantus' city of "utmost necessity" (369d11), which could make no allowance for philosophic leisure.

However, this particularity, while present, is never effectively reconciled with universality. On the one hand it is allowed almost free rein in the lowest class of the city. The wage earners are not subject to the communism of property, women and children. Indeed we are not told what civic duties apply to them at all, if any. They do not appear to be a true part of the *politeia*, except as providers of material support to the

guardians and rulers (416e1-2). On the other hand, particularity is famously and ruthlessly suppressed in the guardian class and this forms the heart of Hegel's complaint, since it is the guardian class that is the subject of his description, in §185, of the *Republic* as the "ideal beauty and truth" of Greek ethical life. Particularity reappears, however, at the highest level in the form of the philosopher kings. Philosophy is an irreducibly individual destiny, since "it is impossible" as Socrates insists and Adeimantus agrees, "that a multitude be philosophic" (494a4). Here the difficulty becomes obvious: Since they are essentially theoretical and not practical, the pleasures of inquiry and contemplation lead the philosopher inexorably away from the city. The philosophers are "not willing to mind the business of human beings" and their souls are "always eager to spend their time above" (*anô aei epeigontai....diatribein*) (517c8-9). They neither wish to rule nor, for that matter, do the citizens wish to be ruled by them.⁶⁷ Reason must be armed itself with force and guile in order to hold the two together. On the one hand, we must "compel" (*prosanankazontes*) the philosophers to care for the city, to go back down into the cave (520a8). On the other hand, the noble lie (*pseudos gennaïos*) is required to keep the guardians loyal to the city (414c1ff), to say nothing of the wage-earners.⁶⁸ The guardians are the "middle term" of the *kallipolis*, the products of

⁶⁷ As Hegel points out in his preface, philosophy for the Greeks was exclusively a "private art". Only for the moderns does it have a public existence. (PR, 20)

⁶⁸ Socrates even says that he would try to persuade the rulers (*archontes*) of the lie, but this would only be in the "best case" and quite unlikely given what will follow in Books V-VII. As for the persuasion of the rest of the city, it is an inescapable necessity that they be persuaded or failing persuasion, be subject to a more direct and unmistakable inducement, fear. Among other things,

Socrates' radical political and pedagogical reforms, but they fail to mediate between the uncultivated particularity of the wage-earners and the philosophical particularity of the philosopher-kings, since the guardian class excludes both passionate individuality (in the form of family and property) *and* the freedom of the theoretical life. Although the best governed city is supposed to be like a "single human being" (462c10), the *kallipolis* is never truly unified and this is true of the philosopher-kings as well, each of whom is actually two people, a ruler and a lover of wisdom. The collective and individual elements are simply laid out alongside one another in a fixed opposition.

It is this fixed opposition, this lack of fluidity, to which Hegel points in distinguishing the "natural" from the speculative grasp of individuality. With the exception of accidents such as children with a "golden" nature being born into a lower class or vice versa, there is no conception of forming the individual into something higher.⁶⁹ The principle of movement between the classes is not subjective choice, but nature. The city is founded according to nature ("*kata phusin oikistheisa polis*" (428e9)) and nature is left to assign happiness to each class (421c1).⁷⁰ The individual is a collection of characteristics, drives and capacities which are given to him by nature, and

the guardian class must police the wage earners to ensure against excessive accumulations of wealth. See 421e7 and cf. the need for instilling fear in order to control the epithumotic part of the soul in *Ti.*, 71a3ff.

⁶⁹ Q.v. 443c5 on the "shoemaker by nature".

⁷⁰ And cf., *PR*, §262A and *R.*, 415aff. The same holds for choice of occupation in the city. As Hegel complains, one's station in society is decided for one by the rulers or by one's birth, as in the Indian caste system (*PR*, §206). In the modern state, by contrast, the individual is free in choice of occupation, while all services demanded from him by the state (with the exception of military duty) are in the form of money rather than personal services – thus leaving the realm of occupation to his arbitrary choice (§299A).

the political task is simply to place the individual in the societal station dictated by his nature. One does not see the unity-within-difference of the capacities, however. Hence, theoretical perfection and practical efficacy are two different kinds of natural gifts and are represented in two different social classes. This leads directly to the difficulty of how one man can inhabit both classes. Particularity, then, is at best a necessary condition of the Platonic political order, but it cannot become a principle in its own right. In its vulgar manifestation it sows discord and faction. In its higher philosophical manifestation (464c2) it is radically separated from practice.

We are now in a position to tie together our reflections on nature, particularity and volition. Because Plato sees volition as exclusively individual or idiosyncratic he failed to see that theory itself is already implicated in the attribution of freedom to volition. Hegel writes, "the distinction between thought and will is simply between theoretical and practical attitudes. But they are not two separate faculties; on the contrary, the will is a particular way of thinking – thinking translating itself into existence." And further, "*the theoretical is essentially contained within the practical*; the idea that the two are separate must be rejected, for one cannot have a will without intelligence" (PR, §4A)[emphasis mine]. The unity of theory and practice is the unity of universal and particular, as well as the unity of the will as free and self-determining with rational, determinate content – the concrete and rational ethical life. There need be no structural disjunction between the will as free and the exercise of knowledge. The task of grasping this, however, is entirely beyond the reach of a political thought

grounded in the intuition of natural kinds. It belongs to exclusively to speculation, since only from the speculative standpoint is it possible to understand the free, subjective act of willing as an "infinity", a "self-referring negativity, the ultimate source of all activity, life, consciousness." But self-referring negativity is precisely the definition of the Absolute! Thus, it is only from the standpoint of "logic as speculative philosophy" that the identity of volition with the activity of the Absolute becomes clear (*PR*, §7R) and this identity renders moot the need for a radical distinction between theory and practice, between individual satisfaction and the commonweal, and between philosopher and city. The limitations of Platonic political philosophy, then, are *logical* before they are political.⁷¹

Personality as Universality: The Dialectical-Logical Structure of Subjectivity

It should be clear by now that Hegel views himself as taking his philosophic stand on eminently Platonic ground. That is, philosophy, or love of wisdom - even if we wish to understand it as an essentially open, zêtetic quest in the manner of Socrates - presupposes at least the possibility of articulating its goal, wisdom. But wisdom, or knowledge of the whole, must include an account both of the nature of the whole which is to be known, such that it is knowable, and an explanation of the seeker of knowledge, such that he can be said to know. At the heart of Hegel's critique is the claim that Plato provides an ultimately incoherent picture of wisdom which, rather than holding subject

⁷¹ Foster, 27. Because Plato views the individual as non-essential, as in itself an accidental instantiation of essence, he has no conception that essence implies *actualization*, and hence that individuality is essential.

and object together in one view, leads to the obscuring of the subject by objectivity. We have followed Hegel's attempt to show that this impasse is not a necessity and that philosophical satisfaction can be actualized because *self-knowledge*, understood completely, is comprehensive wisdom. Both in the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*, this requires a revolution in our conceptual grasp of what it means to be a self-aware subject relating itself, whether theoretically or practically, to a world.

For Hegel, however, "conceptual grasp" can only mean dialectical logic and it is accordingly in the mature logical works, and only there, that we are provided with the full speculative justification of the constitutive status of subjectivity in Hegel, a justification which grounds his claim that Spirit can never return to the ancients, and specifically to the philosophy of Plato.⁷² Otherwise put, the phenomena of human history as well as those of nature are the temporal manifestations of the Concept. History, phenomenology and practical philosophy cannot be understood unless we have grasped the logical activity which is working itself out within them:

....the questions about the nature of *cognition*, about *faith* and so on, that confront us in the realm of representation and which we take to be fully concrete are in point of fact reducible to simple determinations of thought, which only get their genuine treatment in the Logic.⁷³

We turn then to Hegel's "Doctrine of the Concept" (also called the "Subjective Logic") where he provides the conceptual account of the activity of subjectivity which

⁷² VGP, I, 65-69, 46-48.

⁷³ E, §25. The same holds true for the PR as Hegel makes clear in his Preface to that work: ".....I have presupposed a familiarity with scientific method....it will be readily noticed that the work as a whole, like the construction of its parts, is based on the logical spirit." PR, 10.

aims to prove that self-knowledge is knowledge of the whole. The title of this section of the logic can be misleading. It is certainly not the case that only in the third division do we turn to a study of the structure of the *Begriff*. The Concept has been present at every moment of the Logic. However, only now can Hegel turn our attention from the objects of thought as dependent upon thought to the reflexive grasp of “the modes of thought itself”. Stated differently, we have been thinking the Concept all along, it is simply the case that now, after having thought through everything else, there is nothing left to think but the structure of thought.⁷⁴ When we reach the last section of the Logic, on the Idea, we will finally be able to think completely the structure of thought *as* the structure of things. As Hegel points out, in turning to the Concept we are discussing the logical structure which underlies nature *and* spirit, or Thinking and Being, and cannot therefore be identified exclusively with either of them alone but only with the unity of both.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ De Laurentiis, 72. Cf, also p. 73 therein: “This doctrine [namely, of the Concept] is meant to provide a rational grasp of the speculative identity of subject and object in thinking envisaged by Aristotle.”

⁷⁵ *WdL*, 257, 586: “...the Concept is to be regarded not as the act of the self-conscious understanding, not as the subjective understanding, but as the Concept in its own absolute character which constitutes a stage of nature as well as spirit....The logical form of the Concept is independent of its non-spiritual and also of its spiritual aspects.” This is the place to note briefly, that my interpretation of the role of the Logic in Hegel’s system differs markedly from that of thinkers such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, at least to the following extent: I do not believe that the Hegelian system can be understood wholly through such conceptual schemes as the “sociality of reason” or an understanding of his category theory as a kind of “normative space of reasons” which governs the collective search for meaning and value, but without any ontological implications. Rather, I believe that what Hegel says at *E* §24 more fully captures his intention: “Thus *logic* coincides with *metaphysics*, with the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts* that used to be taken to express the *essentialities* of things.” That is, Hegel’s logic is *protê philosophia* in the fullest sense of that term, differing markedly from classical metaphysics, no doubt, both in its conception of essential form (as dialectically developmental rather than static)

This unity can best be approached through a concentration on Hegel's concept of development (*Entwicklung*), the mode of conceptual inference which is unique to the Subjective Logic. The brief sections of the *Encyclopedia Logic* which treat this issue (E, §160-166) are unusually concise and clear, and accordingly we will concentrate on explicating them along with the corresponding material in the *Science of Logic*.

We must begin, however, with a qualification regarding the unity of subject and object in the Idea. This unity cannot obscure for us a certain priority of the subjective element. That is, thought and being are united *within* the activity of thinking, since there

and in its conception of thought as unified with Being, in both theory and praxis. However, it is meant to be an explanation of the unity of thought and being as subject and object, and not merely as an explanation of how historical, communal subjectivity "constructs" its own historically determined structures of meaning and obligation (though, beyond doubt, it is also this). Thus while Pippin is correct in arguing that the Hegelian absolute is some kind of "immaterial or spiritual reality", my reasons for agreeing with him are probably quite distinct from his own. The Absolute is neither merely material or spiritual, objective or subjective. It is both. (PSS, 195: "The Things are just as my thoughts are", and cf., E §166A). On the other hand, readings of Hegel, such as those of Pippin and Pinkard, are quite correct in liberating Hegel from the ridiculous slander of being a mere apologist for Prussian tyranny, etc. Their readings are also of tremendous value in showing just how modern Hegel is, by emphasizing the role of freedom in his philosophy. I would only add that for better or worse, freedom for Hegel, political or otherwise, has a more radical philosophical import, which, Hegel seems to believe, requires a radical philosophical grounding which carries him beyond the confines of the Kantian critique of traditional metaphysics (for a clear statement of the theoretical grounding of all freedom see, *inter alia*, E §24A2). Not all beyonds, however, necessarily lead back to Aristotle. Hegel, at least, intends his metaphysics to be something yet more complete than either Aristotle or Kant could have conceived. What this is all means cannot begin to be understood, I'm afraid, unless one faces squarely the Hegelian claim to have articulated a conception of absolute subjectivity. De Laurentiis makes this point very well at p. 7-8. Pippin's book *Hegel's Idealism* is required reading for any serious encounter with Hegelian thought as is his more accessible article on the Phenomenology "You Can't Get There from Here" in the Cambridge Companion to Hegel. Also indispensable is Terry Pinkard's article "The Successor to Metaphysics: Absolute Idea and Absolute Spirit," *Monist* 74 (1991): 295-328.

is simply *nothing* outside of or beyond the Concept qua comprehensive *logos*.⁷⁶ The same holds true with regard to the nature of conceptual inference and transition in the Subjective Logic. In introducing the Subjective Logic, Hegel emphasizes that the Concept is meant to sublate, and hence to contain within it, the previous logical categories (Being and Essence) (E, §160A).⁷⁷ The form of inference, or conceptual emergence, in the Subjective Logic, must likewise contain and supersede that of the previous divisions in the Logic. This form of inference Hegel calls *Entwicklung*:

The progression of the Concept is no longer either passing over (*übergehen*) or shining (*scheinen*) into one another, but *development*; for the [moments] that are distinguished are immediately posited at the same time as identical with one another and with the whole, and each determinacy is as a free being of the whole Concept. (E, §161)

And again in the *Zusatz* to the same section:

In the sphere of *Being* the dialectical process is passing over into another, whilst in the sphere of *Essence* it is shining into one another. In contrast, the movement of the Concept is *development*, through which only that is posited *which is already implicitly present*. [emphasis mine] (E, §161A)

Perhaps these extraordinarily dense lines can be explained in something approximating plain English as follows: When we study the determinations of the Objective Logic, each such determination is initially grasped as “finite”, as a separate and determinate collection of formal properties. We, the Hegelian logicians, attempt to

⁷⁶ EL, §24A2: “In the Logic we have to do with pure thought or with pure thought determinations” and ad loc. EL, §83: “Only the *Concept* is what is true, and more precisely, it is the truth of *Being* and *Essence*.”

⁷⁷ See de Laurentiis, p. 73: “....the difference between thought and what is being thought is explicitly part of the very identity of thinking itself.”

think through each concept *separately*, to achieve a complete understanding of all its elements and their interrelations and thus to come to something like a definition of the concept we are studying, a definition which fixes the concept in our understanding. The very attempt to do so, however, undermines the separateness and internal coherence of the determination and we then observe how the very effort to grasp it causes it to transform, to “appear” as or “pass over” into its opposite and then into a higher level of development. Once we have thought through all determinations of Being and Essence we have thought the whole structure of Objectivity.

What have we not yet done, then? We have not made explicit for ourselves the nature of the very activity of conceptual transformation which carried us through the study of the determinations of Being and Essence, viz., *Entwicklung*. Specifically, *Entwicklung* in the Concept refers to a newly visible (new for us as logicians, that is) relationship between the universality, particularity and singularity (or individuality) of each and every determination or thought object. One further quote summarizes and sheds some light on the preceding:

The preceding logical determinations, the determinations of being and essence, are of course not mere thought-determinations; in the dialectical moment of their passing over, and in their return into themselves and in their totality they prove themselves to be concepts. But they are....only *determinate* concepts, concepts in themselves – or to say the same thing another way, concepts *for us*. For the other (into which each determination *passes over* or within which it *shines* and is there as something-relational) is not determined as *something-particular*, nor is its third moment determined as *something-singular* or as *subject*: the identity of the determination in its opposite; i.e. its freedom, is not posited, because it is not universality. (*E* §162R)

Positing (*Setzen*) is only possible when the *identity* of each determination with its opposite is understood. And how is this to be understood? Only when we have understood that universality (say, the genus) is not something separate from particularity (the species) or from the individual instantiation of the genus-species relationship (Socrates qua rational animal). It is not a separate conceptual tool which is chosen from a variety of other possible universal determinations and then applied, by an external act of the understanding, to the individual being under investigation (e.g. "This is Socrates. Among his attributes is that he belongs to the set of beings known as rational animals. He is also however a married man through his relation to Xanthippe, an Athenian citizen because both of his parents were" etc.,). Rather universality (whether a genus, class, the set of formal logic or even the Hegelian Concept itself) is universal only by virtue of its instantiation within individuals. Universality necessary must break up into determinate instances, it is "with itself in its determinacy" (*E*, §163). Likewise, individuality is nothing but a development from within universality such that each individual is only understandable because of its implicit universality. This is why the analysis of the Concept will concentrate so heavily on judgment and syllogism. In ordinary logic, syllogisms may be valid and yet be unsound, that is, they may yield false conclusions depending on the way in which we manipulate the major term (the universal) and the middle term (the particular) which are applied. In Hegel, however, syllogism does not denote the manipulation of formal elements in abstraction from determinate content. Syllogism *is* the structure of determinacy.

There is a further claim in the above passage which requires exegesis, and this is Hegel's statement that, in objective logic, determinations are not yet thought in their relationship to "subject". To understand this we must introduce Hegel's distinction between merely formal and concrete universality. The Concept as the definitive "syllogism of reason" is *always* both valid and sound because the application of universal and particular is not arbitrary, it does not reflect the arbitrary choice of this or that logician who chooses to study this or that logical element of an object.⁷⁸ In fact, particularity develops from within and is *posited* by the Concept, which is thereby a "concrete" as opposed to a merely abstract (formal logical) universal.⁷⁹ To anticipate what will follow we can characterize Hegel's central claim as follows: a correct understanding of concrete dialectico-speculative universality comes about through a study of the activity of thinking because thinking is precisely such a concrete universal; in fact, it is the concrete universal *par excellence*. This is what is "subjective" about the Subjective Logic. But all this by way of introduction; now, we must follow Hegel's analysis in a stepwise fashion.

Hegel's treatment of the Concept, or the "Concept as such" begins with his statement that the "universal Concept which we have now to consider contains the three

⁷⁸ *EL*, §163A(2): "It is not *we* who "form" concepts and in general the Concept should not be considered something that has come to be at all....It is a mistake to assume that, first of all, there are objects which form the content of our representations and then our subjective activity comes in afterwards to form concepts of them...."

⁷⁹ *E*, §161: "For the [moments] that are distinguished are immediately posited at the same time as identical with one another and with the whole, and each determinacy *is as a free being of the whole Concept*."

moments, universality, particularity and singularity" (WdL, 273, 600).⁸⁰ These three moments appear in the categorical determination of any being whatsoever. Qua "universal", the Concept would seem to be the analogue in the realm of thinking to pure, indeterminate Being in the first section of the Logic. It is the "utterly simple determination" (*die höchst einfache Bestimmung*) of thought (WdL, 275 601) which underlies any act of thinking whatsoever, but is itself incapable of being the subject of any further explanation (naturally, since any explanation would constitute a new stage of determination of the concept; it would particularize it). This is not entirely false, since the Concept as the structure of the totality of thinking is necessarily also a universal in this abstract sense, once one strips away from it any particular thought determination. But this would be to grasp the Concept only at the level of understanding, as an empty class or category "the concept of color, or of plant, or of animal":

....and these concepts are supposed to arise by omitting the particularities through which the various colors, plants, animals, etc., are distinguished from one another and holding fast to what they have in common..... (E, §163A1)

However, we must remember that we have arrived at the level of the Concept *after* thinking through Being and Essence, and hence the Concept is already *mediated* – it is the result of the previous stages of the dialectic and contains them within itself. As such the concept of pure totality within the activity of thought is now grasped at a far more concrete level than the one we encountered when thinking pure Being which contains "no diversity within itself" (WdL, 82, 82). It cannot be understood if we remain

⁸⁰ Cf. E, §163.

trapped within the categories of traditional rationalist “understanding” with its abstract universals. The universal we are now studying already “possesses within itself the richest content.”⁸¹ It is a concrete as opposed to a mere abstract universality because it has undergone a process of particularization through the various determinations of Being and Essence. A Hegelian universal is thus not merely a generality but rather the process of articulation into all possible particularities of that general class. If, for example, we think of a formal logical universal as a genus (such as “animal”), then for Hegel such a universal is what it is only through its complete manifestation in all of its particular species (man, reptile, single-celled organism, etc).⁸²

This should help us understand the particular itself, as the second moment of conceptual development. The particular too is best understood as an activity; namely, it is the activity of self-determination by which the universal becomes concrete.⁸³ Thus, to continue with our previous example, it is a mistake to say that the species are distinct from the genus. In fact, they are distinct only from one another. But if they were only a collection of differences without an “inner standard or principle that could apply to them” they would simply disintegrate into a heap, a “mere diversity”, or “difference

⁸¹ Cf. *E*, §164R.

⁸² “What is universal about the Concept is indeed not just something common against which the particular stands on its own; instead the universal is what particularizes (specifies) itself, remaining at home with itself in its other, in unclouded clarity.” (*WdL*, 280, 606) Cf. also *WdL* 280, 605: “Life, ego, spirit, absolute Concept, are not universals in the sense of higher genera, but are concretes....”

⁸³ *WdL*, 280, 606: “It [the particular] is not a *limit* as though it were related to an other beyond it; on the contrary...it is the native, immanent moment of the universal; in particularity, therefore, the universal is not in the presence of an other, but simply of itself.”

without unity" (WdL, 280, 606). This is, of course, not the case. They are different from one another as the species of just this genus because the genus is the immanent principle in each one of them. The genus is what gives each of them a certain identity (qua animal) which then allows us to relate their differences to one another. But conversely, there is no genus without the various particular species *in which* we can see it manifested. The genus is only the genus *of* these species and the universal is a universal of particulars: "The particular therefore, not only contains the universal but through its determinateness also exhibits it...the particular is the universal itself" (WdL, 280, 606).

Singularity, the third moment, is perhaps the most difficult of the three to understand since it takes us even further afield from any ordinary categories of formal logic. Hegel writes of the singular (or individual) that it is:

....the inward reflection of the determinacies of universality and particularity. This singular negative unity with itself is what is *in and for itself determined* and at the same time identical with itself, or universal (E, §163).

In ordinary logic we identify the individual with, for example, Socrates in the statement "Socrates is a man". However, what Hegel means by a singular individual includes, but is not limited to "merely immediate singularity....single things, or human beings, etc" (E, §163R). It is certainly true that Socrates is a singularity, in the sense of a singular being who we can understand only through subsuming it under a comprehensive universal (animal) through a particularization (human). But Socrates is precisely a particularized universal (a specific example of animal or of man) and *also* a universalized particular (this here individual Socrates contains within his identity an

element of universality – he is a human animal). We must reflect this duality back onto the Concept. A concept, any concept, we said, is universal by virtue of being particularized in its various determinations. However, being a universal with just these particular determinations is what makes a concept (mammal, say) into *just this concept*, differentiated from all others. It is what allows us to identify the *individual* concept. Now we must turn from an example of a determinate, limited concept to the total structure of conceptuality, the *Begriff*. Since the Concept is a concrete universal, it too is an individual. In fact, it is *the* comprehensive individual which is known not by reference to any other external to it (since there is none) but precisely by means of the totality of its own determinations. It is the “determinate universal” (*WdL*, 296, 618).⁸⁴ The singular, then, is *not* a sublation in which universal and particular negate each other and pass over into a higher level of conceptual development (*ibid*). The individual rather, is simply the “Concept posited as totality” (*E*, §163).⁸⁵ We return once again, by a long road, to Hegel’s insistence that any determinate being is comprehensively understood only in light of the whole, because, in a certain sense, it is the whole. The moments of universality, particularity and singularity, when we try to think them, turn into one another and this is the Concept.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ “It is only the moment of singularity that *posits* the moments of the Concept as distinctions” [emphasis mine] (*E*, §164R).

⁸⁵ Cf. *E*, §164.

⁸⁶ “Universality, particularity and individuality are, according to the foregoing exposition, the three determinate Concepts, that is, *if one insists on counting them* [emphasis mine]” (*WdL*, 288, 612).

We are now in a position to understand an otherwise curious juxtaposition. Section 163 of the Encyclopedia contains a purely formal analysis of universality, particularity and singularity, and yet in the *Zusätze* the theme suddenly shifts to God, the infinite worth of man, slavery and the fact that the true conception of universality only entered the minds of men with the appearance of Christianity. The significance of this bizarre shift is that in uncovering the true interrelation among the three moments of the Concept, Hegel has uncovered the identity between true, concrete universality, on the one hand, and individual subjectivity on the other. In her commentary, Allegra de Laurentiis puts the point excellently well and merits an extensive quote:

Universality suggests an absence of difference while particularity implies difference. If these are taken to be moments of substance as it is understood in pre-critical metaphysics, their contradiction appears irresolvable: a complete and independent substance (a 'universal') is supposed to be the ground for incomplete and dependent accidents (particulars)....Hegel argues that the contradiction is resolved dialectically by grasping substance as subject. To be a subject is neither to be merely the substratum (the *hypokeimenon*) of external determinacies nor to be the determinacy of an independent substratum. To be subject is to be that one substratum that produces its own determinacies....a subject whose nature is to act upon itself....the actuality of singular things and forces is in-itself actuality while that of the Concept is for itself actuality or *self-actualization* [emphasis mine].⁸⁷

Self-actualization, then, is *both* subjectivity as such (that is, our experienced human life) and the lifeblood of conceptual universality. However, grasping this identity between what seems most particular and immediate, on the one hand, and most

⁸⁷ De Laurentiis, 92. Cf. *E*, §163, Remark: "but the singularity of the Concept is strictly what is effective – and of course it no longer works like a cause, with the semblance of producing something else: rather it is what produces *itself*."

abstract and distant from us, on the other, requires a massive exertion of thought which justifies reiterating the point one more time.

What is unique about the subjective Concept is its more complex articulation of negation; that is where the entire discussion of *Entwicklung* has been leading. In the doctrine of Being, for example, Being and Nothing are initially thought as mutually exclusive concepts. We only rise to a higher level when we realize that in fact there could not be contradiction between the two were there not also common ground which made possible their contradiction in the first place, and this is becoming. Becoming is the double, or second negation, not simply because it appears at a remove of two negations from the initial concept of pure Being, but because it negates the purportedly fixed and mutually exclusive (i.e. mutually negating) relationship which the understanding believes to obtain between the first two concepts. It negates the *negation* itself. However, at this stage the activity of negation has not yet become an *explicit* or “in and for itself” part of the identity of the determinate concept “Becoming”; for this reason, becoming is for Hegel only a dialectical and not yet a fully speculative concept.

By contrast, the thinking activity of the subject, which is what is being discussed in the Subjective Logic, *is* fully speculative. Whenever I think anything whatsoever, I am of course thinking of it as something different from something else, as this particular thing with these qualities (and hence *without* other particular qualities which are not part of it) and also as different from myself who is doing the thinking. I place before myself, or posit, a certain object of thought and by doing so I am separating it off, thinking

“difference”. To take a perfectly trivial example, if I think of a tomato, I am thinking of it as red, seeded, and round and hence, *inter alia*, as not yellow, elongated and seedless, since otherwise I would be thinking of a banana. I am making an original separation, or *Ur-teil*, that sets the tomato off from the whole continuum of objects and allows me to investigate just this tomato. But I am also “separating” in the sense of isolating this particular object of thought from my activity of thinking itself, which is a continuum, or infinite undetermined universal, capable of presenting to me (or in Platonic-Aristotelian language, taking on the form of) any object of thought whatsoever.

It is just at this moment, if I am fully self-reflexive, that I come to realize that there must be a prior unity of my self-consciousness which is present in each and every moment of thinking, indeed which is the ground of the possibility of me thinking any separate being whatsoever. *I* am the continuum of thought which can determine itself into infinite particular thoughts.⁸⁸ I am a concrete universal. To put the point quite trivially, even if I am to engage in the *echt verständlich* activity of analyzing my tomato into its essential and accidental attributes then *I*, the unity of my self-consciousness, must be present at each stage of the analysis and throughout the temporal series of such analyses, since otherwise thinking collapses into the famous Humean “bundle” of mental representations which pass through the empty theatre of the mind, but are not “had” or “possessed” by anything over and above the bundle itself. Upon reflection,

⁸⁸ See *E*, §24A1 where Hegel notes that the “*I*” is an abstract universality that is also implicitly concrete.

however, Hume's position leaves us with two disastrous options: either no one is having the representations, which makes it ultimately impossible to understand in what way they are bound together as this or that particular bundle (that is, as this or that mind), or, as some have tried to argue, the representations are actually having themselves, that is, a certain representation appears in the bundle which is the thought of the bundle as a unity,⁸⁹ and this is clearly nonsense since representations or concepts are mere thought elements, they do not think; *except, of course, for Hegel.*⁹⁰

For Hegel, the elements of thought are the elements of the Concept and the Concept is reflexive in precisely this sense – it is a totality by virtue of being manifest in each of those particulars as the activity of each individual, thinking human being is manifest in the variety of his thinking moments. This is the intent of Hegel's otherwise cryptic formulation: "The Concept is what is altogether concrete, because negative unity with itself as being determined in and for itself (which is what singularity is) constitutes its own relation to self, or universality" (*E*, §164). Negative unity is the activity of thinking identity and difference, or unity and multiplicity together, and this is the

⁸⁹ For a stout-hearted effort to defend Hume's theory see Nelson Pike, "Hume's Bundle Theory of the Self: A Limited Defense," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 4, 2, (April 1967): 159-165. Pike's defense, in my opinion, never gets off the ground, through no fault of his own but as a result of the utter intractability of the problem itself.

⁹⁰ Hegel, in this sense, attempts to articulate completely what Parmenides had said was impossible, in his refutation of Socrates' suggestion that each of the forms is a thought that comes to be nowhere but in the soul (*Prm.*132b1ff). Parmenides responds at 132c9ff that this would necessarily entail - given that each thing must partake of form (*metechein tôn eidôn*) - that each thing "consists of thoughts and everything thinks" (*ek noêmatôn hekaston einai kai panta noein*).

activity of the Concept and the thinking subject.⁹¹ Unlike relations of cause and effect or reciprocal action (studied earlier sections in the *Logic*) thinking is a self-determining activity. The object of thought is not “caused” by the subject of thought, rather thought determines itself into its various particular thought objects, it *posits* them.

Furthermore, the Concept achieves its totality in time, or more specifically, in human history (a process which we study in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). There is then, no transcendence of temporality and no need to abandon subjectivity in knowing the eternal intelligible order because temporality is the full manifestation of eternity. Unlike the palinode of the *Phaedrus*, the soul does not need to step out on to vault of heaven in order to become wise. To state the crux of the matter one last time: Hegel claims to have interpreted discursively what is intimated only “in chapter headings” in the recollection myth of the *Meno*: in passing through all of the articulations of *phusis hapasa* with which the soul is said to be linked, the soul is in fact passing through the determinations of its own activity. The soul, when understood absolutely as the Concept, is always at home with itself and hence free, because it is thinking only itself.⁹²

This, then, is the fundamental thought which the Greeks had failed to articulate, which “took millennia to enter men’s consciousness”. As Hegel writes,

⁹¹ De Laurentiis summarizes this complex line of philosophical analysis on p. 87: “In-itself, consciousness must be one in order to posit a difference. This positing consists of the fundamental judgment (*Ur-theil*): “I think x and I and x differ. But as this judgment takes place, consciousness becomes for itself: it recognizes that the distinction is its own.”

⁹² Cf. *E*, §234: “This return unto itself is at the same time the recollection [*Erinnerung*] of the content into itself....”

The Greeks, although otherwise so highly cultivated, did not know God, or even man, in their true universality...The Christian religion is the religion of absolute freedom and only for Christians does man count as such, man in his *infinity and universality*....what the slave lacks is the recognition of his personality, *but the principle of personality is universality* [emphasis mine]; (E, §163A1)⁹³

The discovery of the identity of personality and universality is the logical basis for the satisfaction of the subjective quest for wisdom. We have come full circle, then. What the Subjective Logic achieves for Hegel is that it allows him finally to articulate in a completely rational manner what Plato had left to mythical presentations – the soul's likeness to the Ideas and its receptivity to them. In Plato, this likeness or receptivity is never explained and hence degenerates into a kind of *unio mystica*. Hegel, by contrast, means to show that this likeness, the *adequatio intellectus et rei*, is the product of a development, or process, which is manifested in all of the soul's capacities - and especially in the structure of thinking - and hence available to it for investigation.

In the last section of the *Logic*, we are finally raised to the level of the Idea, the fully articulate unity of subject and object, which is initially manifest as life, then as cognition and finally as Absolute Idea. In light of what has gone before, the presence of an extended disquisition on life and the life-impulse (*Trieb*) in the closing chapters of the

⁹³ Cf. *WdL*, 297, 619: "Life, spirit, God – the pure Concept itself, are beyond the grasp of abstraction, because it deprives its products of singularity, of the principle of individual and personality and so arrives at nothing else but universalities devoid of life, spirit, color and filing." Cf. Hegel's 1827 lectures on Religion in *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Die Vollendete Religion*, Teil 3, herausg. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984), 262: "Dieses so in sich unendliche Subjekt, seine Bestimmung zur Unendlichkeit ist seine Freiheit..."

Logic should no longer surprise us since the Concept itself can be understood as a kind “logical organism”, as Hegel writes:

What corresponds to the stage of the Concept in nature is organic life. For example, a plant develops from its germ: the germ already contains the whole plant....but in an ideal way....the Concept remains at home with itself in the course of its process. (E §161A)

The essence of biological life is *Trieb*, drive or impulse and the essence of *Trieb* is the desire of the individual to universalize itself through reproduction. This desire, we now know, is neither a chimera nor a wild goose chase, because individuality is in fact universality. *Trieb* is not only the biological phenomenon nor is *Entwicklung* only a mode of logical inference. Both are in fact the same, living power of the Whole.⁹⁴ Desire, then, and subjectivity generally, did not need to be extinguished or transcended, they needed only to be made fully rational. Alcibiades can be satisfied after all.

⁹⁴ Cf., VGP, 43: “The liveliness of spiritis an urge [*Die Lebendigkeit des Geistes....ist Trieb*], it passes over into the hunger and the thirst for truth, presses for knowledge of it, for the satisfaction of this urge”, and VGP, 47: “The true has the urge....to develop itself [*Das Wahre hat den Trieb....sich zu entwickeln*]. Only the living, the spiritual moves....self-develops.” These quotes are taken from the Felix Meiner Verlag edition of the *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Walter Jäschke. The page numbers refer to the 18th volume (*Vorlesungsmanuskripte II*).

CHAPTER 2

CHARMIDES: *Self-Determination and Self-Knowledge*

Our first chapter set forth, in some detail, Hegel's complex critique of the problematic status of the subject in Platonic thought. We turn now to the more difficult, perhaps even quixotic work, of establishing that this problematic was visible to Plato.

If this is the task, then the *Charmides* seems a particularly inauspicious place to begin. While self-knowledge dominates the second half of the dialogue, its initial promise as a definition of *sôphrosunê* is quickly lost in a terrifying jungle of epistemic paradoxes which leave the interlocutors spinning in circles, as Socrates complains (174b11).¹ To complicate matters further, these paradoxes seem to be only tenuously linked to the theme which opens the discussion: *sôphrosunê* as the health or good order of the whole soul. As one commentator notes: "Plato deals with self-knowledge only once, in the *Charmides*; and that discussion is itself baffling, appears marginal to Plato's main concerns, and seems to spring philosophically out of nowhere."²

The present chapter will be devoted to overcoming this bafflement by making two related points: First, the thematic unity of the *Charmides* as well as its obscure treatment of reflexivity and knowledge are understandable only as part of a broader

¹ I have chosen to retain West's rendering of *sôphrosunê* as "sound-mindedness." While slightly wooden, it has the great advantage of emphasizing that the focus of the *Charmides* is on the "minded" aspect of the virtue. "Moderation" with its emphasis on self-control in bodily indulgences would miss the close link between *sôphrosunê* and knowledge. Unless otherwise noted, all Stephanus references in this chapter are to the *Charmides*.

² Julia Annas, "Self-Knowledge in the Early Plato," in *Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1985), 111.

consideration of whether the soul is self-constituting or self-determining entity. This is neither to impose a Hegelian reading on the dialogue nor to use it as a convenient ancient proof-text upon which to elaborate a modern doctrine. In any case, modern subjectivity is an interpretation of the significance of certain elements of human experience. Qua human, these elements must be available to the modern, the ancient, and indeed to any minimally reflective human being.³ These same elements, I will argue, are in the foreground of the *Charmides* as well. Plato's interpretation of their significance, and hence his evaluation of subjectivity is indeed different from Hegel's. We will begin to limn the reasons for this difference in the present chapter and in those which follow.

The second point is rooted in a conviction that any worthy exegesis of a Platonic text begins from the obvious phenomena and concludes by preserving those phenomena within its final explanation. The most obvious fact about the *Charmides* is that Socrates discusses self-knowledge and *sôphrosunê* with two men, Critias and Charmides, who later figure prominently in the bloody and tyrannical junta that ruled in Athens after the

³ This is true regardless of how we assess the importance of Christianity. It is true that the Greeks did not have a conception of a free, creative, personal God who is the incomprehensible ground of comprehensible, rational order. In that sense, Christianity is indeed a very radical transformation in the *status* of subjectivity – now in an important sense the ground of Being rather than a province within Being. This hardly constitutes a discovery of subjectivity as such, however. That the Greeks were aware of man as a thinking and creating being surely needs no proof. And I would argue that they were certainly aware of the phenomenon of man's freedom, at least in the minimal sense of not being entirely determined by nature. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b30: *Pollachêi gar hê phusis doulê tôn anthrôpon estin* – “man's nature is in many ways enslaved”. Many ways is not all ways.

Peloponnesian War.⁴ This juxtaposition of sobriety and radicalism conveys us to the decisive question: Why did Plato consider this particular inflection of human nature, namely, the tyrannical (or, at least, proto-tyrannical), to be critical to the assessment of self-knowledge? The answer lies, I believe, in the subterranean connection between self-knowledge and the status of individuality in general and the way this connection is manifest in the character of Critias, the true object of Socrates' interest.⁵ Understanding Critias – what he tries to assert and what Socrates wants to discover about him – is the key to articulating the dialogue's unity and its ultimate philosophical import.⁶

⁴ Critias was the leader of the Thirty and Charmides was his subordinate, appointed to head the government of the Ten which ruled in the Piraeus. Both men were killed at the battle of Mynichia. Cf. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, II, iii, 1ff and *Memorabilia*, I, ii, 12ff. For a full modern treatment of the tyranny of the Thirty and the democratic counter-revolution, see Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). Krentz tries to balance the picture of Critias' excesses as presented in Xenophon, an account which he argues may be biased by the latter's need to curry favor with the post-403 democratic restoration. However, Krentz is ultimately forced to confess the "brutality" of the Thirty (p. 130), which brings him substantially in line with Xenophon (cf. *Hellenica*, II, iii, 15). And even Plato, hardly a democratic enthusiast, remarked that the administration of the Thirty made the previous reviled democracy look "golden" (*chruson apodeixantas tēn emprosthen politeian*), *Ep. VII* 324d7-8.

⁵ The dramatic situation in the *Charmides*, then, resembles the *Gorgias*, where the refutation of Polus instigates Callicles' entry into the fray, and the *Republic*, where Socrates' cross examination of Polemarchus is preparatory to the crucial encounter with Thrasymachus, which is itself a struggle over who will be the educator of Plato's two brothers.

⁶ I agree then, with Thomas Tuozzo's assessment that Critias makes a substantive contribution to the dialogue. See his "Greetings from Apollo: Charmides 164c-165b, Epistle III and the Structure of the *Charmides*," in *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides. Proceedings of the Vth Symposium Platonicum*, ed. Thomas M. Robinson and Luc Brisson (Sankt Augustin: Akademie Verlag, 2000): 296-305. Tuozzo also notes correctly that Critias' long speech interpreting the Delphic *Gnôthi Sauton* (164c7-165b4) forms the center of the dialogue. See Thomas Tuozzo, review of *Plato's Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality*, by W. Thomas Schmid, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (1998.08.16). On the importance of the center in classical rhetoric, see Cicero, *Ad M. Brutum Orator*, XV, 50.

The main focus of this chapter, then, is a close reading of the central section of the dialogue (162c1-167a7) in which Critias offers his definition of *sôphrosunê*. I will prepare the consideration of that section by an investigation of the dramatic prologue. Once we have completed our analysis of the central section, it will be possible to venture some preliminary comments on the very perplexing Socratic investigation of Critias' definition, which begins at 167b1ff and includes, among its other oddities, the conclusion that a doctor cannot be said to know anything about the art of medicine (171a1) as well as Socrates' dismissal of the possibility of knowing that one does not know – precisely the description of his own “human wisdom” in the *Apology* – with the words: “nothing anywhere would appear more unreasonable (*alogôteron*) than this” (175c7-8).

The Prologue: Politics, Eros and the Whole

Politics has an ambiguous presence in the opening of the *Charmides*. On the one hand, the dialogue opens just as Socrates returns from Potidaea, one of the first engagements of the Peloponnesian War. As we have already noted, two of the future members of the oligarchic Thirty are present, but also Chaerephon, a fanatic (*manikos*) (153b2) and a supporter of the democracy.⁷ Furthermore, near the conclusion of the

⁷ Cf. *Ap.* 21a3. Of all of those whom Socrates recognizes in the *Taureas*, Chaerephon alone is singled out for mention. Drew Hyland sees this as Plato's exoneration of Socrates from the charge of fomenting oligarchic tyranny. In other words, Socrates could claim pupils and friends on both sides of the Athenian political divide. See Drew Hyland, *The Virtue of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Charmides* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), 23.

dialogue the theme of politics is made explicit in Socrates' two images of a city ruled completely by sound-mindedness (171d1-173d5).

And yet, for all this, there is an unmistakably private quality to the conversation, a certain disregard of hard political facts, portrayed dramatically in the contrast between Socrates' cold indifference to the great events of the day and his friends' great eagerness to hear news from the front: "And when we'd had enough of such things, I, in turn, asked them about the things here, about philosophy and how things stood with it now (*peri philosophias hopôs echoi ta nun*)...." (153d2-3). "Such things" is all Socrates has to say about the terrible maiming and death of relatives, close friends, and countrymen, about the mortal struggle of Athens at the outset of what Thucydides called "the greatest movement" which had ever come to pass among the Greeks, part of the barbarians, not to mention the whole of humanity.⁸ This private quality becomes still more conspicuous by contrasting the *Charmides* with the opening of the *Republic*. Unlike the *Republic*, where the threat of force is needed to keep Socrates in Piraeus, he does not need to be compelled into discussing moderation with dubious customers such as Critias. Socrates goes willingly, even gladly (*hasmenôs*), to his usual occupations, and by extension, to this conversation (153a2). This absence of compulsion in the *Charmides*, this eagerness of Socrates for conversation, even to the point of employing a blatant falsehood in order to lure Charmides, is reflected in the investigation itself, which quickly transcends the

⁸ Thucydides, *Historiae*, I, i, 7-9.

strictly traditional, or political understanding of *sôphrosunê*.⁹ Charmides' definitions do incorporate properly aristocratic, and hence politically salient, qualities such as orderliness and quietness in all actions (159b3) and proper shame and modesty (*aidôs*) (160e4), but these are demolished by Socrates in a somewhat underhanded manner, as if to clear the public highway for other matters. Critias, on the other hand, in his elaboration of *sôphrosunê* as "knowledge of knowledge" seems to disregard the *polis* altogether until it is reintroduced, inconclusively, by Socrates near the end of the discussion. Both Socrates and Critias ignore the "demotic" aspect of *sôphrosunê* as restraint of bodily desire and the dialogue as a whole abstracts from the role of *sôphrosunê* in the *Republic*, as the harmony or bond which joins together the various parts of the city.¹⁰

Instead, Socrates "strips the souls" of Charmides and Critias not for the practical purpose of showing them that they do not yet know what they need to know in order to rule (as he does, for example, in *Alcibiades I* and in the examination of Glaucon portrayed in Xenophon) but apparently in order to understand their desire for rule, rather than to

⁹ A fact which thoroughly confuses Charmides, as pointed out by Aryeh Kosman in his insightful essay. See L.A. Kosman, "Charmides First Definition: *Sôphrosunê* as Quietness," in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, vol 2., ed. John P. Anton (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 203-216.

¹⁰ R. 430d1-432a9 and cf. 442c10-d1. Stanley Rosen notes that the comedy of the *Charmides* is characterized by a "certain ironic detachment from the domain of practice" which would naturally come in for Hegelian criticism as the "prototype for the alienated resignation of Stoicism." See *Sôphrosunê and Selbstbewußtsein*, 102-103. This is also noted by Hyland, though I cannot agree with him that politics is entirely "suppressed" in the *Charmides*. See Hyland, 24.

purge them of it. It is not the relationship of ruler and ruled which is in the foreground of the *Charmides*, but the relationship of love of mastery and self-knowledge.¹¹

The tension between the political and trans-political in the dialogue can be understood as follows: Man first becomes fully self-conscious within the context of his relation to others, that is, within a political or implicitly political context. This is equally true for Plato as for Hegel. Of course, neither politics nor the Hegelian inter-subjective encounter of two individuals in mortal struggle can be the *origin* of self-consciousness. This would obviously be impossible, *stricto sensu*, since politics and even the struggle for *Anerkennung* presupposes a relationship between already *self-conscious* individuals. I mean, rather, that man first becomes an object of investigation for himself in the *polis* where, as a matter of course, he distinguishes and compares himself to those around him. This very effort of explicating himself to himself, to transform his self-consciousness into articulate self-knowledge, quickly carries man beyond the political context and into a general investigation of the nature of knowledge and of the soul. This raises the question of the feasibility of a complete discursive account of the unity of man's political, or practical, existence, which exercises certain of his psychic capacities, and the trans-political, or theoretical, search for knowledge, which requires others.¹²

The introduction also presents an instructive contrast between Socrates' experience of desire and that of Charmides and Critias. When Charmides comes into

¹¹ Cf. *Alc.* 1, 106c6-9 and *Xenophon, Mem.* III, vi.

¹² As is obvious, this also implicates the question of the unity of the psychic capacities themselves; that is, the question of what the soul *is*.

the wrestling school, the momentary kerfuffle over who will sit where allows Socrates to glance inside the young boy's cloak. He reports, "I was inflamed and no longer within myself" (155d4).¹³ Socrates' erotic experience is of an *ekstasis* which carries him, temporarily, outside of himself. One cannot fail to notice here the presence of a kind of eros which is discussed in great detail in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* as pointing to the intellectual desire for intelligible form. And yet, eros as self-transcendence is otherwise remarkably absent from the dialogue and so too, with some brief but very telling exceptions, is any discussion of the soul's noetic capacity for grasping form.¹⁴ Neither Critias nor Charmides seem to possess an erotic nature of this particular type. Charmides is the passive beloved of everyone present, while Critias is propelled into the discussion by his natural contentiousness and concern with *his* individual reputation (162c1-4). In concentrating on Critias as the main character, the dialogue abstracts from the phenomenon of eros in general in order to concentrate on one specific inflection, viz., *thumos*, the love of honor, victory and mastery. The irreducibly individual nature of thumotic concern - the desire to be honored as *this* individual here - points to fundamental question of whether the individual as such is in fact knowable at all without knowledge of the whole.

¹³ This could also be translated more colloquially as "I was no longer in control of myself" but a more literal translation of the Greek (*ouket' en emautou ên*) brings out the sense of the passage for my purposes.

¹⁴ The two exceptions, which will be discussed at greater length, appear at 160d6 and 166d5.

Precisely this relation of wholes and parts is implicit in Socrates' claim that, while at Potidaea, he had learned a cure for headaches, which have been ailing Charmides, from the doctors of the Thracian god-king, Zalmoxis.¹⁵ The cure of this bodily disorder requires, according to Zalmoxis, the application of a leaf and the chanting of an incantation which induces *sôphrosunê* in the soul (155e6-8). The reasoning Socrates employs is straightforward – a part cannot be cured on its own, but only together with the whole:

But....Zalmoxis....being a god, has said that just as one must not try to heal the eyes without the head nor the head without the body, thus neither the body without the soul, and this is the cause of why many diseases escape the doctors among the Greeks, that they are ignorant of the whole to which care must be given, for if it is not in a good condition it will be impossible for the part to be well." (156d9-e6)¹⁶

The same implication arises from Socrates' earlier account of the holistic medicine of the Greek doctors:

But perhaps just as you have already heard from the good doctors, whenever someone comes to them with a pain in the eyes, they say, I suppose, that it is not

¹⁵ This is an absolutely critical moment, too often dismissed as mere window dressing or as a tall tale whose only significance is as a ruse for luring Charmides into a discussion. Tuckey's commentary, for example, has not a single word to say about the entire episode. There is a short article on Zalmoxis by David J. Murphy, which makes some useful points regarding this story. Ultimately, however, his interpretation of the tale as a cover for Plato's Pythagoreanism – his search for a "ratiocination that will free the soul from the material world" – gets us nowhere because, by reading the *Charmides* as proleptically anticipating the full-blown "Platonism" of a "Theory of Ideas and a "doctrine" of the immortality of the soul, he assumes a Platonism that is not so easily imputed to Plato himself. See David J. Murphy, "Doctors of Zalmoxis and Immortality in the *Charmides*," in *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides. Proceedings of the Vth Symposium Platonicum*, ed. Thomas M. Robinson and Luc Brisson (Sankt Augustin: Akademie Verlag, 2000): 287-295.

¹⁶ I depart from Burnet's emendation and read *agnooien* here, which is better supported in manuscripts B and T, rather than *ameloien*.

possible to attempt to cure the eyes alone. Rather, it is necessary to treat the head along with them, if the eyes are to be in a good condition. And again, to think of ever treating the head itself by itself (*autên eph' heautês*) without the whole body would be a great folly (156b4-c3).

This passage raises several questions: In what way can the soul be said to be a whole of which the body comprises the parts? The body as a whole is an organization of parts that are themselves bodily – organs, limbs, etc. But how does the soul become a whole through the interrelation of the body? Or is the soul merely the sum total of body parts? And in what way can the body be said to be “part” of the soul as a head is part of the body or eyes are part of a head? One has eyes “in” one’s head but it is hard to see how the body is “in” the soul. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Socrates vacillates on whether the soul is in fact the whole or whether, as he also says, the “whole human being” (*panti tõi anthropõi*) encompasses both body and soul. In this case, soul would perhaps be the decisive element from which all goods and evils flow, but it is therefore only a part (156e7-8).

Sôphrosunê in the Zalmoxis tale, then, is linked to the awareness of the problematic nature of the soul and the question of whether and how it becomes well ordered, a true whole. Zalmoxis insists, and Socrates agrees, that the health of the part depends on the health of the whole. If so, we need to know either that the soul is naturally a whole or if it is not, what exactly *is* the whole which we must care for in order to tend to the health of the psychic part (156c5).

And yet, perhaps the Zalmoxis tale was never addressed to Charmides and his headache at all. Although the whole story was ostensibly for the benefit of “my dear Charmides” (157c6), it elicits no response whatsoever from the young man (who remains silent until 158c6). Critias, on the other hand, jumps right in:

What a lucky find (*Hermaion*) Socrates, he said, would this illness in the head be for the young boy, if it compels him, on account of his head, also to become better in thought (*tên dianoian*)....Know well, then, that he appears by far to be the most sound-minded of all his contemporaries.... (157c7-d7)

There are two ambiguities here: First, if Critias is right and Charmides is already *sôphronestatos tôn nuni*, he certainly does not need Zalmoxis. One could simply apply the medicinal leaf without the incantation, in which case, either Socrates was lying when he said that the leaf cannot work without the incantation (155e6-8) or, since the incantation is identified with the beautiful speeches which induce *sôphrosunê* (157a4-6), there is no need for Charmides to converse with Socrates. But then Critias would miss the chance of showing off his ward and cousin and proving that he is in fact the most beautiful of all in both body and soul. This difficulty is missed by Critias, who, in his eagerness, seizes on the cure as an acquisition, a godsend, which, once in our possession, perfects our thinking (*dianoian*). Furthermore, Socrates mentioned the soul as a whole; he never said that the incantation would improve only discursive thought. Perhaps Critias identifies the soul as a whole with the ratiocinative capacity; if so, this would be the first inkling of

Critias' later shift from *sôphrosunê* as self-recognition to *sôphrosunê* as determinate science, or *epistêmê*.¹⁷

Charmides as Interlocutor

Before turning to Critias, one further element deserves notice: the resounding failure of Charmides as an interlocutor, a failure made all the more surprising considering the initial high hopes and, more importantly, given the fact that Charmides' answers seem to develop in sophistication under Socrates' influence, until an abrupt *volte-face* at 161b3ff. Charmides begins by defining *sôphrosunê* according to its external manifestations – the orderly (*kosmiôs*) and quiet (*hêsuchê*) manner in which things are done (“walking in the streets and conversing and all the other things likewise”)(159b3) and moves from there toward a definition of the internal state (modesty or shame, *aidôs*) which manifests itself in *sôphrôn* actions (160e2-3). Charmides' third definition, *to ta heautou prattein* (the doing's of one own thing)(160b6) is his most promising. The progress of Charmides, then, is toward greater and greater interiority – toward understanding *sôphrosunê* precisely by understanding what it does to the soul, or in the soul. This exactly accords with Socrates' own instructions. He assures Charmides that “if *sôphrosunê* is present in you, you will be capable of opining about it. For necessarily, I suppose, being in you, if it is in you, it would furnish you with some perception of it....”

¹⁷ A point well noted by David Lachterman in his excellent and sadly unpublished interpretation of the dialogue. See David Lachterman, *Plato's Charmides: An Experiment in Interpretation* (B.A. Thesis, St. John's College, Annapolis, 1965), 19. Cf. also Aristotle, *EN*, 1166a17.

(158e7-159a2). Later, in encouraging Charmides to formulate a new definition, Socrates says,

Once again, then, Charmides, I said, apply your mind further and look into yourself, consider what kind of person *sôphrosunê* makes you, being present, and what kind of thing it is that would produce someone like that, and reckoning all these things together say well and courageously what it appears to you to be. (160d5-e1)

The request has two parts: first, that Charmides consider his soul by looking into himself, that is, that he be self-aware as to his own condition (whether he is in fact *sôphrôn* or not) and second, that he consider the kind of *ousia* which *sôphrosunê* must be, given the work it accomplishes. Charmides is being asked to consider both the soul and the nature of *sôphrosunê* which can be present in the soul but is obviously not identical with it. The answer to the question of how the two – the soul and some intelligible (whether a form, or activity or nature) are related to one another, how an *ousia* like *sôphrosune* is “in” the soul, might require a strange (*atopos*) answer. But here we come up against the outer limit of Charmides’ personality. He is uncomfortable with appearing strange in the eyes of others, as he shows by blushing and hesitating to give an answer to Socrates’ question as to whether he already is *sôphrôn* (158d2). After the refutation of his second definition, he stops looking into himself and merely parrots a definition which he has heard from another, most likely Critias.¹⁸ Moreover, he shifts

¹⁸ Something of this problem is already evident when Charmides offers his first definition of *sôphrosunê* as “a kind of quietness” (*hêsuchiotês tis*) at 159b5. Socrates says of the definition, “Indeed, Charmides, they say (*phasi*) that the quiet are *sôphrôn*.” Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, I, iv, 27 and I, v, 35. For an alternative assessment of the first definition, see Kosman, 207.

the burden of investigation onto Socrates, ordering *him* to investigate whether the man who identifies *sôphrosunê* with “minding one’s own business” speaks truly (161b4-6).

Charmides’ curious passivity can be explained by recalling that he is a beloved. Young Charmides is already the object of all attention. Everyone is in love with him and gazes upon him as if he were a statue (*agalma*)(154c8). His beauty cancels all natural distinctions (such as between the old men and the pre-pubescent boys, 154c5-7); everyone flows in a perfect circle around him (155d1-2). In other words, Charmides, in his youth, has already achieved the primary object of tyrannical desire: he is recognized and adored by all.¹⁹ The fact that Charmides appears at the beginning of the dialogue and is young, that is, at the beginning of life, should not blind the reader to the fact that he is a terminus; he represents the *end* of the process of gaining recognition from others. Secondly, having reached the end of this process Charmides is no longer capable of seeing that he might still lack something. Socrates points directly to this problem when asking whether he already partakes sufficiently of *sôphrosunê* or whether he “is still in need” (*endeês einai*)(158c4). It becomes quite clear by the end of the interrogation that Charmides is incapable of reflecting on his neediness because he is incapable of seeing it. To move the conversation forward, we require someone who is in fact conscious of himself as *endeês* and this person is Critias, not Charmides.

¹⁹ Cf., *Alc. I*: 105c3-4. The ambiguity of this recognition lies in the fact that it is by virtue of bodily perfection. This will soon be transformed by Critias, who desires recognition of a psychic capacity – his argumentative excellence.

Critias and the Central Speeches

Charmides, then, is an end who simultaneously returns the reader to the beginning of the thymotic struggle for recognition, where we can observe its development. Everyone looks at Charmides (*eblepen*) in adoration while *he* looks at Critias with mockery (*hupegela*)(162b11) and it is this blow to his reputation which shows Critias that he lacks what he desires and what seems to come so effortlessly to his young cousin.

Socrates informs his unnamed listener that for a long time (*palai*) it had been clear that Critias was “agonizing”, spoiling for a fight, that he was motivated by love of honor (*philotimôs echôn*) (162c1-3) and that he could no longer restrain himself (162c3-4).²⁰ Critias is primarily motivated by his desire to be held in good-repute (*eudokimôn*) always (169c7), stated otherwise, by *vanitas* or the desire for recognition, as well as by a desire to impose his will upon those around him just as the playwright imposes the script upon the actor (162d3). It is precisely Charmides’ inability to perform as a subordinate which ignites Critias’ wrath.²¹

²⁰ On this point see Seth Benardete, “Interpreting Plato’s *Charmides*”, in *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, ed. Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 245: “Critias....steps in because he wants no one to think of him as a fool, and that is clearly impossible unless one is a god or a tyrant.” Cf. W. Thomas Schmid, *Plato’s Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 45.

²¹ The subordination of Charmides to Critias appears again at the end of the dialogue (176b9-c2).

Moral aestheticism, however, is no basis for assessing the characters of a Platonic dialogue.²² Despite his vainglory and anger (to say nothing of his later infamy), the Critias of this dialogue is a close associate of Socrates, indeed Charmides himself remembers Critias this way from childhood (156a8). Most importantly, however, nearly every teaching normally associated with Socrates is here placed in the mouth of Critias. He is the source of the identification of *sôphrosunê* as “doing one’s own thing”. He expounds at length on the Delphic *Gnôthi Sauton*. He, and not Socrates, identifies *aretê* (in this case *sôphrosunê*) with *epistêmê*.²³

Precisely by being needy and *conscious* of his neediness, then, Critias is higher than Charmides and occasions a broadening and deepening of the philosophical possibilities of the dialogue. Anger and the desire for recognition and mastery are all present as elements within thumotic self-assertion.²⁴ Just as in Hegel, the fundamental

²² See Tuozzo, *Greetings from Apollo*, 300ff. Benardete is very valuable on this point. He shows quite clearly that there is no attempt here by Socrates to convert Critias (or Charmides, for that matter) to philosophy. In examining Critias, Socrates is examining his own philosophical activity “parading about as knowledge” and refuting its pretensions. See Benardete, *Plato’s Charmides*, 256: “Socrates comes back to Athens and takes back his own.”

²³ Indeed, in the *Charmides* there is no explicit discussion of *sôphrosunê* as a virtue at all. The word *aretê* appears only once in the dialogue, in Socrates’ dubious praise of Charmides’ familial lineage as distinguished in “beauty, virtue and in the rest of *so-called* [emphasis mine] happiness (*eudaimonia*)” (158a1).

²⁴ Socrates’ image of Critias as a poet and Charmides as the actor who blows his lines (162d3) is itself an indication of the theme of mastery and submission in the dialogue. Of course, an actor necessarily interprets lines as he recites them and in this sense something of his own is combined with the work he recites. But this does not change the fact he must interpret and bring out the sense of precisely *this* work written by *this* poet, and not the sense of his own lines or those of another poet in which case he would be interpreting something else altogether. When we say that an actor has done his work well we mean to say that he has truly embodied or brought to life the intent of the particular *poiêtês* whose work he is interpreting. One might perhaps say that a

and universally operative passions are the impetus to philosophical development. In fact, the importance of the section we are studying is such that the only way to achieve an understanding of the arguments in the second half of the dialogue is to see that those arguments unfurl the consequences inherent within Critias' attempt to justify his thumotic desire. The dialogue shows Socratic practice being transformed by a very different economy of the soul.

Let us note again the immediate context of Critias' entry into the argument. Socrates has just refuted a definition of *sôphrosunê* which, in the *Republic*, was a definition of justice, *to ta heautou prattein* – doing one's own things (161b6). There is good reason to believe that Charmides heard this definition from Critias who took it over from Socrates.²⁵ Socrates capitalizes on Charmides' commonsensical assumption that *sôphrosunê* is connected to the good and to doing well (*eu*)(162a4-5) to point out that for things to be managed well often involves not only minding one's own business in the strict sense, but a great deal of minding other people's business. The writing-teacher, the doctor, the architect, all in some sense "mind" the affairs of others. Of course, Charmides might have simply replied that it is the proper business of some people to manage the affairs of others and in doing so they are in fact doing their own thing. For

truly great actor has discovered within the *poiêmata* levels of meaning which escaped the notice of the poet himself, but the fact remains that the poet is the master within whose framework the actor qua "slave", or worker, is free to move. The actor may transform the framework but if we are no longer able to identify the work in question as that of the poet, the actor is no longer an actor. He has become another poet and thus subject to a different set of criteria. Critias desires recognition as the only legitimate poet, or master, of the conversation.

²⁵ Cf. *R.*, 433a8-9.

some people *sôphrosunê*, or minding one's own business, involves *polupragmosunê*, or being a busybody. The dialogue itself provides an unmistakable example of just such a busybody in Socrates who is not minding his own business, but the business of Charmides, the ward of Critias. By making his own definition of justice (which Critias perhaps assumed he understood perfectly well after so many years in Socrates' company) into an enigma, Socrates essentially goads Critias into a contest over who is the fully justified busybody or ruler of the affairs of others.²⁶

Hesiod

How is it possible, Socrates asks, for *sôphrosunê* to be the doing of one's own things if craftsmen make things in a sound-minded manner although they do not make their own, but other people's, things? Unlike Charmides, Critias is not about to be stumped: "So then, I suppose I have agreed that those who *do* (*prattontes*) the things of others are sound-minded if I agreed that those who *make* (*poiountas*) them are" [emphasis mine] (163a10-12). Critias intends to establish a difference between doing (*prattein*) and making (*poiein*) such that his definition will be preserved. We would expect that this distinction will show that while *making* the things of others can in some cases be sound-minded, *doing* the things of others cannot but that this is not a problem

²⁶ Cf. *R*, 336b1.

because the craftsman, in *making* things for others, is, in fact, *doing* his own thing or minding his own business.²⁷ This is not quite the tack which Critias chooses to take.

His answer takes the form of a sophistic *epideixis*, in this case, an interpretation of a half-verse from Hesiod: “Work is no Disgrace” (*ergon ouden oneidos*). First, Critias opposes disgrace (*oneidos*) to the beautiful (or noble) (*kalon*) and the pair are then used to distinguish between making (*poiein*), doing (*prattein*) and working (*ergazesthai*).²⁸ Disgraceful activities, such as shoemaking, fish-mongering or prostitution are left in the category of makings (*poiêseis*). Those makings which come to be along with the beautiful (*meta tou kalou*) or beneficially (*ôphelimôs*) are peeled off and given over to the class of “works” (*erga*), or more accurately to the class of works and deeds (*ergasias te kai praxeis*). “Only such as these [that is the beautiful and beneficial works and deeds] are kindred to one’s self (*oikeion*), everything harmful (*blabera*) is alien” (163b3-c8 *in passim*).

The nerve of Critias’ interpretation is the identification only and exclusively (*mona*) of *kala kai ôphelima erga* as one’s own. As is obvious, this is an echo of Socratic teachings which associate what is one’s own with true, as opposed to merely apparent,

²⁷ The distinction is, of course, suggested by Socrates himself in his question to Charmides about whether a city would be better managed if each had to produce all necessities of life himself.

²⁸ *Kalos* or *to kalon* is a difficult Greek term to render because it includes several shades of meaning. Aesthetic, or physical, beauty is certainly one element, but the term also refers to fineness or nobility, which is wider than the simply aesthetic but can approach closer to a moral excellence (as in a “noble” or “handsome” deed) – in short, it includes everything lovable to the eye and to the mind’s eye. While I translate *kalos* here as beautiful, the multiplicity of its senses must be kept in view as demonstrated by Critias’ indeterminate and ambiguous use of *kalos* as both beautiful and noble (or elegant).

profit and utility.²⁹ However, we need to understand how Critias understands both beauty and benefit, on the one hand, and one's own (*oikeia*), on the other, and on this point his speech is exceedingly opaque. The only available route into the problem is by noting what cannot, according to Critias, fall into the category of the *kala kai ôphelima*. Critias gives three examples of disgraceful activity, all of which involve selling for money. However, the focus seems to be not on the fact that money is involved, but on the lowly or vulgar nature of the merchandise in each case – shoes, salted fish, and prostitution. To say nothing of other considerations, Critias gives no reason for assuming that trade in beautiful objects, for example, could not be both beautiful and beneficial. Would it not be beneficial to have money, provided one does not have to trade in pickled fish to get it?

Here our particular difficulty begins to swim into view. Critias' identification of beauty and benefit with "one's own" or "what is kindred to oneself" is, of course, meant as an explication of what "one's own business" is, i.e. of the reflexive pronoun *heautou* in the formula *to ta heautou prattein*. There is, however, no element of introspection in his interpretation. One does not need to know first what one truly is before one can know how one's things will benefit one, as Socrates teaches in *First Alcibiades*.³⁰ Furthermore,

²⁹ Cf. *Prt.* 358b and esp. *Men.* 88d2: "*kata dê touton ton logon ôphelimon ge ousan tên aretên*". The interpretation of Hesiod's verse was negatively associated with the Socratic school in the minds of many Athenians. Xenophon had to defend Socrates from the charge of perverting the sense of this verse, cf. *Mem.* I, ii, 56.

³⁰ *Alc.* I 128e10-11.

no allowance is made for a distinction between the mere appearance and the reality of beauty or nobility.

Prior to a detailed analysis of his later speeches, it is not easy to know what to make of Critias' interpretation. Perhaps, he assumes that the true *sôphrôn* already has unmediated knowledge of what is his own by means of the ability to calculate benefit and recognize *to kalon*. The self-knowledge necessary for doing's one's own things would be a kind of practical calculus immediately manifested in action. At the very least, Critias seems to think that self-knowledge and praxis are a seamless whole.

Socrates emphasizes that this appearance of wholeness rests upon an uninvestigated ambiguity with regard to each of the parts. He brings out this ambiguity by a subtle terminological shift from *kalon* and *ôphelia* to the good (*agathon*):

Critias, I said, right away, even as you were beginning, I almost understood your argument: that you call things good (*agatha*) that are kindred to oneself (*oikeia*) and one's own (*ta hautou*), and you call the makings of good things doings....So now, back again from the beginning define it more clearly: The doing of good things (*tên tôn agathôn praxin*), or makings, or however you wish to name it – is this what you say *sôphrosunê* is? (163d1-e2)

Critias endorses this as a clear (*saphôs*) restatement of his intent (163e10) but he fails to see that the introduction of the good only complicates matters so long as we have no explanation of the relationship of goodness to benefit and beauty. An accomplished safe-cracker, after all, benefits himself when he "helps himself" to the jewels of his victim and he can do so elegantly, with each break-in a masterpiece of polished execution. The simple shoe-maker may do his humble (though for Critias, disgraceful)

work well, thus benefiting himself and his customer but he is excluded from the class of “doing and working” because of his lowly station. Or is there something else about the shoemaker which nevertheless rises above the quotidian nature of his work and allows him to qualify as *sôphrôn*? A hedonist calculus of benefit combined with arch class snobbery cannot answer this question because it cannot provide an account of the good which unites and gives order to beauty and benefit. If beauty and benefit can be instantiations of goodness – as seems reasonable – we still need to explain how the good is manifest in them while at the same time distinct from them as their principle.

Crucially, Socrates never denies that goodness is related to benefit and also to beauty. Nor does he refute the definition of *sôphrosunê* as “the doing of good things”. Nothing, he says, prevents Critias from speaking the truth (164a1). However, the introduction of goodness points to a problem with knowing the self: unless the *sôphrôn* man can say what the good is he cannot be said to know exactly what it is he is doing, since, on Critias’ own premises, one’s own things are identified with “doings” (*praxeis*) and these latter are exclusively the good “doings”. Now, if the *sôphrôn* does not know what he is doing then, in the decisive sense, he does not know himself.

Critias’ interpretation of Hesiod had intimated that the *sôphrôn* knows what is truly *oikeios*, “kindred” to himself, a word that is closely tied to *idios*, the private or peculiarly personal. But now it appears that the route to knowledge of the private must pass through the good, knowledge of which might not be private, but rather public (*koinon*) and hence that the *sôphrôn*’s knowledge of “his own things”, and himself, is a far

more complex affair than Critias had led his listeners to believe. We are reminded again that for Zalmoxis the route to the health of the part passes through care for the whole. Contrary to the appearance given by the drift of the subsequent conversation, then, it is not true that the good is suddenly dropped as a theme only to reappear at the very end of the dialogue.³¹ Instead, the introduction of the good opens a breach within Critias' definition between the ability to act and the ability to understand oneself.

Delphi and Self-Knowledge

Socrates capitalizes immediately on the breach between doing and understanding in order to lead Critias into the problem of self-knowledge. He asks: "However, I do wonder about this very thing, whether you believe that human beings who are sound-minded are ignorant of being sound-minded?" (164a1-3). Socrates mentions a doctor who, by virtue of his technical mastery of medicine, benefits a patient (by inducing health) and himself (by getting paid)(164a9-b1). Doing so, he does what is necessary and Critias agrees that he who does the necessary things (*ta deonta*) is sound-minded (164b6). To *kalon*, *ôphelia* and *agathôn* as elements in the definition of sound-minded action, Socrates now adds a further terminological distinction, the necessary or requisite things (*ta deonta*), and hence a further layer of complication, since necessity need not be related to beauty in order to be related to goodness. A revolting medical procedure might produce good and beneficial results. Furthermore, the judgment as to what is necessary is complex, dictated, as it often is, by the duties of one's profession or

³¹ Tuozzo is quite right to point this out. See Tuozzo, *Greetings*, 300.

position within a social context (as the doctor has a Hippocratic duty to *primum non nocere*). Once again, there is a challenge here to Critias' identification of the good with the private which points to the problem of self-awareness.

The doctor, we are told, may cure the patient through the effective use of the *iatrikê technê* while being ignorant of whether this was beneficial or harmful in any particular case. And similarly, the craftsman can use the tools of his trade without knowing if doing so will profit him (164b7-9).³² Socrates is not talking about someone who goes through the motions of his craft in a trance, not fully aware *that* he is doing something. Rather, he says that the doctor acts beneficially or harmfully *ou gignôskei heauton hōs epraxen*, literally, "without recognizing himself how he did it" (164c1). The reflexive binary construction of the Greek – in which the doctor is, at one and the same time, the object of the verb of recognition and the subject of the verb of acting – allows Socrates to point to the problem: the doctor both does not recognize himself and does not recognize how he himself did what he did (i.e. benefit or harm).³³ But of course the doctor cannot recognize *how* he did what he did because he does not even know *what* he did and this knowing of *what* has been done is tied, Socrates now insists, to the necessity of recognizing oneself.

Socrates, then, wants to know what degree of self-awareness must be present for any action, however beneficial or beautiful it might be, to count as *sôphrôn*. We should

³² Perhaps, as Tuckey notes (p.22), it would have been better for the patient to die in a particular circumstance. Tuozzo's interpretation of this passage is very subtle. See Tuozzo, *Greetings*, 299.

³³ Benardete, *Plato's Charmides*, 246.

note, however, that there is no identification here of *sôphrosunê* with self-recognition *simpliciter*. The most that can be said at this stage is that self-recognition, or self-consciousness of some kind or another is a necessary, though perhaps not sufficient condition for the presence of *sôphrosunê*.³⁴ However, the introduction of self-recognition evidently reminds Critias of Socrates' oft-repeated invocation of the injunction "Know Thyself" (*Gnôthi sauton*) as well his identification of virtue with knowledge, and he senses a matchless opportunity to best his own teacher.³⁵ *Sôphrosunê*, the practical capacity for doing well, will be identified with knowledge, as Socrates is always insisting, and moreover, it will be identified with the *self*-knowledge at which Socrates seems to be hinting here.

Critias' interpretation of the Delphic inscription is confusing on many levels and I begin by noting three such ambiguities: On the one hand, he says that *sôphrosunê* is almost (*schedon*) the same thing as self-recognition (164d3) but later identifies the two as simply the same (164e7). That is, self-recognition is no longer merely a prerequisite for being *sôphrôn*, it is *sôphrosunê*. Next is Critias' focus on the source of the Delphic *gramma*. The inscription itself says nothing about its origins; it does not tell us whether it is the word of a god or of man. For Critias, however, it is obvious that the inscription is human, not divine (164d5). The words of the gods have their origin in the man

³⁴ The same would hold for other mental states. A man in pain also recognizes himself, says Tuckey, since he *gignôskei heauton hoti algei* - recognizes that he himself is in pain. Tuckey, 25-26.

³⁵ For an incisive treatment of memory and its relationship to *doxa* and *philosophia* see Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 72 and 185-190.

confident enough to tell us what the gods say. This gains in significance when we observe how he understands the relation between human and divine.

“The one who put up the inscription at Delphi” did not, according to Critias, intend to remind the supplicant of the distance that separates him from the gods. Rather, the inscription is to be understood as a greeting (*prosrêsis*). And yet, “Know Thyself” is not actually the greeting, because the man who put up the inscription speaks (or makes the god speak) “in a riddling manner” (164e6). The inscription says “Know Thyself” but actually it means “Be Sound-minded!” The merely human greeting had been “Rejoice!” (*Chaire*), but Critias insists that those who wish to greet as gods do will now say “Be Sound-Minded!” (*Sôphronei*).

What, precisely, is at stake in insisting that the inscription is a divine greeting? Critias does not elaborate, but we can suggest two possibilities. First, in the ordinary course of things, a greeting is simply answered with a formal response, not with an effort at introspection as would be the case if *Gnôthi Seauton* were interpreted as a divine command. Critias separates the Delphic injunction to know oneself from any actual effort at introspection and turns it into a formal address between equals. For those in the know, apparently, self-knowledge as looking into oneself drops away.

That this is the case is confirmed in the final - and to my mind - decisive peculiarity of Critias’ interpretation. He makes very heavy weather of the fact that “Know thyself” is not a piece of useful advice (*sumboulên*) (165a6). This, he says, was the mistake made by those who added the other two inscriptions at the entrance to the

temple: “Nothing overmuch” and “A pledge and ruin is near” (165a3). These counsels of moderation and caution, two elements traditionally associated with *sôphrosunê*, express an awareness of finitude and limit in human life. Those who wrote them apparently interpreted “Know thyself” as knowing one’s place, namely knowing that one was *not* a god. For tradition, the knowledge which grounds practical action is the knowledge of man’s subordinate place within the whole. Stated differently, *Gnôthi Sauton* as traditionally understood denies that man could be the independent and sufficient ground of his own self-determination. He must take his practical bearings from a cognizance of what lies beyond him.

When our previous reflections are brought together, it becomes clear that, all along, Critias has sought to reverse precisely this deprecation of the human realm.³⁶ Advice necessarily implies inequality, even where this inequality is obscured by the elaborate mechanisms of *politesse*. The giver of advice is superior to the receiver because the giver has something which the receiver is presumed to lack, (experience, say). For Critias, however, those who truly know themselves greet each other as equals and are

³⁶ Tuozzo also sees that Critias’ interpretation of *Gnôthi Sauton* as a greeting, along with his firm insistence that it is not advice, is the crux of his whole speech. Tuozzo compares this to Plato’s own meditation, in the Third Epistle, on why he chooses to replace the traditional salutation of “*Chairein*” with his own customary *Eu Prattein* (Ep. III, 315a5-c5). Advice, according to Tuozzo is advice about means to an end, the end being already chosen by the person advised. A greeting, on the other hand, “makes reference to an end whose worth is endorsed by both speaker and addressee” or an end which it is hoped will be endorsed by both. As such, then Critias, like Plato, substitutes *Chaire* with something else because he is identifying the substitute – *Sôphroneî* as the highest good – as the end to be desired. Tuozzo, *Greetings*, 301-302. The difficulty in his interpretation is that advice is not necessarily subordinate to given ends, but can be about those ends themselves. One can, after all, advise someone to desire different ends.

greeted as such by the god. The practical advice which arises from the recognition of human limits is replaced by thinly veiled identification of the *sôphrôn* with a god.

What could justify such a radical reinterpretation? It hardly follows, after all, from Critias' identification of *Gnôthi Sauton* with *sôphrosunê*. Quite to the contrary, that identification would seem to imply precisely the necessity of a moderate, judicious assessment of what man is and is not. To understand Critias' point we must link his Delphic interpretation to his earlier statements and place it within the broader context of his *agôn* with Socrates.

To begin with the first of the two tasks, we need to understand whether Critias' Delphic speech is meant to replace or perfect his earlier defense of the definition of *sôphrosunê* as "doing one's own things". We recall that the interpretation of the Delphic inscription was prompted by Socrates' demonstration that it might be possible for someone to act sound-mindedly without being aware that he was being sound-minded. Critias recoils from this and is willing to retract anything he said (*egôge mallon anatheimên*) that might lead to such a conclusion (164c5-d1), but he does not go on to tell us which of the things he said deserve to be retracted. Instead, he equivocates: "*Perhaps, you were speaking more correctly about those things, and perhaps I was*"; what is certain is that matters were not "clearly spoken" (*saphes....elegomen*) (165a8-b3). To clarify matters, Critias does not retract his definition of *sôphrosunê* as *to ta hautou prattein*, nor his identification of *hautou* with benefit and beauty. He is, however, willing to give an account (*didonai logon*) of *sôphrosunê* as self-recognition (165b4). In other words, if we

join together Critias' two long speeches the result is that self-recognition explains the ability to do one's own thing, to act well. *Sôphrosunê* is a kind of self-knowledge which is manifested in sound action, hence it would be impossible for someone to act sound-mindedly and yet be unaware of himself.

Prima facie, this is perfectly reasonable. Critias' confrontational conclusion to his Delphic speech ("And now I am willing to give an account of this, if you don't agree with me that *sôphrosunê* is oneself recognizing oneself" 165b3-4) implies that he believes he is entitled to Socrates' assent to what is an essentially Socratic teaching. And indeed, here too, Critias would seem to be in the right. Is it not Socrates, after all, who always insists on the necessity of knowing one's own self in order to know how to act and live well? Furthermore, it cannot be denied that, Platonic evasiveness to one side for the moment, Critias' divination of man echoes the identification of *nous* or of the philosophical life, with the divine, which recurs in the speeches of Plato's Socrates.³⁷ Charmides' memories of Critias' close *sunousia* with Socrates seem, then, to be confirmed.

And yet, something is clearly awry. Alongside references to the divine, Socrates associates the Delphic injunction with the necessity of *skepsis* into the nature of the soul as a whole and links this to an awareness of the necessity of moderation.³⁸ The Delphic

³⁷ See *Phlb.* 28c6-8, *R.* 589e4, and *Phdr.* 249a1-b1 and 256a5-c7.

³⁸ *Phdr.* 229e5-230a6: "I am still not able to "know myself" as the Delphic inscription enjoins and it seems laughable for me to think of other things which I am still ignorant about myself....For me, the question is whether I happen to be some sort of beast even more complex in form and

injunction is the impetus to understanding both the identity of the soul with the whole (through its “divine part”) but also, most crucially, its difference or distance from that whole. In Critias this is completely absent. The suppression of any link between *sôphrosunê* as introspection and the need for practical moderation can only be explained, I believe, as a reflection of his confidence that there is a kind of comprehensive, discursive knowledge which unites the knowledge of the soul in all its capacities with the knowledge of other theoretical or practical objects. His previous definition of *sôphrosunê* as the doing of one’s own beautiful and beneficial things was *not* wrong, then, it was merely incomplete because the account of knowledge was incomplete. It is now certified by his interpretation of the Delphic inscription. Self-recognition is recognition of the immediate unity of the self and the good, of insight and will and hence of theory and practice. By means of this unity, the self is transformed from an object of *skepsis* into a self-determining principle and hence the traditional link between knowing oneself and the counsels of moderation is rendered *superfluous*.

In fact, the teachings of Plato’s character have an interesting corollary in the fragmentary tradition attributed since late antiquity to the historical Critias (or at least to the milieu with which he was conversant). I refer to the doctrine of volitional intellect, or *gnômê*. *Gnômê* is a cognitive capacity which combines intellectual insight and the will,

more tumultuous than the hundred-headed Typhon, or whether I am something simpler and gentler, partaking by nature of the divine (*theais....moiras*) and un-Typhonic”. At R. 589e4 ff, Socrates’ reference to the divine part of the soul is made in the context of restraining the lowest, or appetitive part of the soul.

and rules over the soul, which is identified with the senses and with the bodily functions.³⁹ *Gnômê* is not a receptive capacity, but rather a creative power and its product is character (*tropos*). According to one fragment attributed to Critias (from a play titled *Perithoos*), *tropos* is contrasted favorably with *nomos*, in a reevaluation of the relationship of nature and convention:

A good character is more reliable (*asphalesteros*) than the laws
An orator can never overthrow it
Whereas in all ways he can, with speech, confuse and often mutilate the laws.⁴⁰

We should note that it is not *phusis* as such which is higher than the *nomoi*, but only *phusis* refashioned by *gnômê*. Man as a product of his own capacities stands above both nature and convention. In a further fragment of a satyr play, *Sisyphus* (until recently, generally accepted as a work of Critias), this conception of man's self-determinative power is also the origin of the divine:

And then, I think, humans decided to establish laws
To punish [wrongdoers] so that justice might rule
And be master over crime and *hybris*....
Then, the laws held public deeds in check
And prevented men from open acts of violence,
But they acted secretly;
Then it was, I believe, that a shrewd man, gifted with *gnômê*
Invented for mortals a fear of the gods.....⁴¹

³⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 405b6ff.

⁴⁰ DK 88B22 (in Stobaeus III, 37, 15).

⁴¹ This so called Sisyphus Fragment (DK 88B25), was identified as a work of Critias by Sextus Empiricus and the attribution was accepted until very recently, among other by Willamowitz and by Mario Untersteiner, in his work on the Sophists. In 1977 Albrecht Dihle argued for attribution to Euripides, and this has become the majority view among classicists. I take no position on the question as it is not crucial to my argument. Even if it is a work of Euripides, the Sisyphus fragment is a distillation of an intellectual milieu with which the historical Critias would have been familiar (as is evidenced in the *Perithoos* fragment quoted above, which even Dihle agrees is

Stated differently, man's creative power supplies the deficiencies of both *nomos* and *physis*. Strictly speaking, however, *nomos* is already on a higher level than *physis* simply. By nature men are scoundrels, by means of *nomos* they can at least be made to appear publicly just, which is no mean achievement. By virtue of the *gnômê* of the shrewder, or stronger spirits, men are completely pacified, remade into citizens.⁴²

Critias' thymotic urge to master the conversation can now reveal its underlying philosophical justification. He had been angered that Charmides mangled his definition of *sôphrosunê* as an actor mangles the lines of the playwright (162d3). And yet, when Critias enters the conversation, he seems to be reciting and *rewriting* the lines of Socrates. The new sense of those lines is that the individual, correctly understood, is a self-sufficient unity of theoretical insight and practical efficacy. Upon this basis Critias stakes his claim to perfect Socratic teaching and to rule the conversation.

justly associated with Critias). I will only add, as an aside, that the fact that Plato puts into the mouth of his Critias statements so similar to those of the Sisyphus fragment constitutes, to my mind, powerful *prima facie* evidence for a restoration of Sextus' attribution. See Mario Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, trans. Kathleen Freeman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 331-336. Albrecht Dihle, "Das Satyrspiel Sysiphos" in *Hermes* vol. 105, 1 (1977): 28-42. Charles Kahn, "Greek Religion and Philosophy in the Sisyphus Fragment," in *Phronesis* 42, 3 (1997): 247-262.

⁴² Cf. Descartes' distinction between *les esprits faibles* who require faith in the immortality of the soul lest they be led astray "from the straight path of virtue" (*Discourse on Method*, V) and *les esprits plus forts*, the true audience of his works. *Les esprits forts* possess *générosité* in its unique Cartesian sense: "...his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it [his volition] well, that is never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best" (*Passions of the Soul*, 3:153).

From Self-Recognition to Self-Knowledge as a Comprehensive Logos

I have preempted something of my analysis of the whole central section in order to allow us to see the implications Critias' two long speeches and Socrates' reactions to them. Critias' intentions become still clearer as we proceed deeper into what initially appear to be arbitrary verbal shell-games which begin at 165c4 and continue up to the conclusion of the central part of the dialogue (167a7).

Up to this point, Critias had spoken only of *to gignôskein heauton*, or self-recognition as a kind of awareness, in keeping with the requirement that the *sôphrôn* be aware of himself as he acts. Socrates, however, now shifts the terms of the debate again by getting Critias to agree that if *sôphrosunê* is recognizing something then it must be some kind of knowledge (*epistêmê tis*) and hence "of something" (*tinou*) (165c5).

The unsolicited switch from *gignôskein* to *epistêmê* looks, at first glance, like a bit of Socratic subterfuge. *Gignôskein* refers to knowledge by acquaintance, while *epistêmê* is usually reserved in the Platonic lexicon for scientific knowledge of intelligible form. To speak of an *epistêmê* of oneself begs the question of whether the self, or soul, is the kind of object which lends itself to epistemic knowledge. It does not follow from an acquaintance with oneself, that is, from self-consciousness, that epistemic self-knowledge is possible. Critias, however, answers without hesitation that the *epistêmê* which is *sôphrosunê* does have a determinate object – "oneself" (*heautou*) (165c7); Critias simply carries over the same reflexive pronoun from his statement at 165b4 that *sôphrosunê* is *to gignôskein auton heauton* ("one's recognizing oneself"). He sees no

problem in answering this way because he sees no difference between an activity of the soul like recognition which can be reflexive, and *epistêmê*, a determinate body of knowledge. Otherwise stated, there is no reason, as far as he is concerned, why the soul might not be amenable to the kind of knowledge reserved for other fields of science.

It should be clear by now that the switch to *epistêmê* is not as arbitrary as it first appeared. It is the elaboration of Critias' interpretation of Hesiod and the Delphic inscription. Socrates is drawing out what we had earlier identified as Critias' confidence in the ultimate unity of self-consciousness with theoretical and practical knowledge as a whole. The science of man gives access to, or grounds, the other sciences because it is essentially the same as those sciences in its method and in the intelligibility of its object.⁴³

Critias should have had no difficulty with what follows. Socrates uses the example of medicine (*iatrikê*) and its product, health, as well as architecture and its product, houses, in order to ask after the beautiful work (*kalon...ergon*) of *sôphrosunê*. The conversation up to this point provides Critias with two ready answers. The use of the example of medicine and health reminds us of the discussion of *sôphrosunê* as psychic health at the beginning of the dialogue. And it is Critias who had identified "one's own" with the beautiful (noble) and beneficial deeds. The great work of *sôphrosunê*, then, would be either to produce itself, qua health of the soul or, in the earlier words of Socrates to Charmides, the presence of *sôphrosunê* in the soul will

⁴³ As Benardete notes, Socrates is following Critias' script but feeding him the lines. Benardete, *Charmides*, 248.

produce (*apergazoito*) a certain kind of person.⁴⁴ And yet, Critias' anger prevents him from making this connection:

But Socrates, he said, you are not inquiring correctly. For this is not similar in its nature to the other knowledges, nor are the others to each other. But you are making the inquiry as though they are similar. For tell me, he said, what work is there from the art of calculation or geometry such as a house from housebuilding or a cloak from weaving or other such works.... you won't be able to. (165e3-9)

Critias begins by insisting that the kinds of knowledge differ from one another and that *sôphrosunê* is as different from all of them as they are from one another. But he then proceeds to retract this distinction. In fact, there are two classes of knowledge: productive (such as architecture) and non-productive, or theoretical, such as calculation or geometry. *Sôphrosunê*, then, is not quite different from all other knowledge, since it is the same as the non-productive or theoretical ones in lacking a separate *ergon*, or product.⁴⁵ Socrates accepts this distinction but insists that qua determinate *epistêmê*, *sôphrosunê* must still have a determinate *object* which is distinct from it as the odd and the even is from *logistikê epistêmê*. Since Critias had already answered this question at 165c7 (it is the *epistêmê heautou*, knowledge of oneself) his failure, once again, to connect the dots within his own argument makes his answer here seem all the more perplexing:

This is it, Socrates, he said, you have come in your search to the very thing by which sound-mindedness differs from all the knowledges, yet you are inquiring after some similarity between it and the others. But this is not how it is; rather, while all the others are knowledges of something else and not of themselves, it

⁴⁴ Cf. 157aff and 160d8-9.

⁴⁵ Critias fails to notice that this would imply that *sôphrosunê* cannot be the source of *ta kala kai ôphelima erga* either. He is losing sight of the connection between *sôphrosunê* and the good, which he had previously established, just as surely as the one between *sôphrosunê* and the self.

alone is a knowledge both of the other knowledges and itself of itself (*autê heautês*). (166b7-c3)

"Itself" has now replaced "oneself". Knowledge is reflexive with respect to itself, but it is not clear if this has anything to do with the soul's knowledge of itself. It is Critias, then, and not Socrates, who completes the absorption of *sôphrosunê* into theory by placing it together with the other theoretical and non-productive sciences and thus obscuring any specific connection between *sôphrosunê* and self-knowledge. The traditionally Socratic equation of virtue with knowledge has now expressly entered the conversation through the positing of an architectonic and reflexive knowledge.

Socrates does not immediately begin to refute this new definition. Instead, he only makes a minor adjustment. He asks whether such a "knowledge of knowledges" must not by definition also include a knowledge of non-knowledge (*anepistemosunês*)(166e7). This makes intuitive sense, since one who possesses the knowledge which orders and identifies all knowledge should also be competent to identify what parades about as knowledge but is not. Critias agrees unreservedly (*panu ge*). Socrates then provides a summary definition, which he attributes to Critias:

Then only the sound-minded one will himself both recognize himself (*heauton gnôsetai*) and be able to examine both what he happens to know and what he does not; in the same way it will be possible for him to investigate (*episkopein*) others in regard to what someone knows and supposes, if he does know, and what he himself supposes he knows but does not know. No one else will be able to. And this is what being sound-minded, and sound-mindedness and oneself recognizing (*gignôskein*) oneself are: knowing (*eidenai*) both what one knows and

what one does not know. Is this what you are saying? Indeed, I am, he said. (167a1-7)⁴⁶

The two antagonists appear to have found common ground at last. Both have identified a virtue, *sôphrosunê*, with *epistêmê* in the strict sense, and *epistêmê* is now understood to be both the capacity for self-recognition and the master key to all forms of knowledge. We would seem to have come to the most propitious moment in the conversation: Critias' reformulation of the Socratic position has been restated by Socrates and then accepted by Critias. And indeed, Socrates marks this convergence by invoking the auspicious third libation to *Zeus Sôtêr* (167a9) and inviting Critias to investigate together (*episkepsômetha*) whether such knowledge is possible and if possible, what benefit it might bring (167a9-b4). However, the libation masks the fact that Socrates and Critias are using the same words while in fact engaged in two quite different enterprises, reflecting two different inflections of human nature. We begin with Critias.

Implicit all along in Critias' argument was his insistence on the god-like self-sufficiency of the *sôphrôn* and his definition of *sôphrosunê* at 166c2-3 makes explicit the content of his earlier interpretations of Hesiod and the Delphic *gramma*. The switch from knowledge of oneself, to the knowledge by knowledge of *itself* and the addition of *tôn*

⁴⁶ Burnet and Bekker both read line a4 differently than the main manuscripts (BT). West, the translator, follows the ms. tradition and I have maintained his translation for the purposes of convenience. While the amended reading seems to me to make more sense in the context, my interpretation does not depend on conclusively deciding this point.

allôn epistemôn does not follow necessarily from the previous discussion.⁴⁷ Nothing in that discussion would require that the kind of knowledge by which the self knows itself or the activities of the psyche, also be the knowledge which knows the form (or content, it is unclear which) of all other kinds of knowledge. The necessity here is not logical, but psychological. It follows from Critias' desire to complete Socratic philosophy by basing it upon fully discursive self-knowledge.

And yet, immediately after his interpretation of the Delphic *gramma*, Critias almost completely loses sight of the connection between the self and this "the knowledge of itself and all other knowledges". All future invocations of *gignôskein heauton* and of the reflexive nature of *sôphrosunê* come from Socrates, not Critias.⁴⁸ As we have seen, the reason for this would seem to be that as far as Critias is concerned there does not need to be any distinction between the two. At 169e1, for example, Socrates has conceded, for the sake of argument, the possibility of "knowledge of knowledge" but then proceeds to ask how self-recognition makes "one any more able to know what one knows and what one does not know?" Critias answers as follows:

⁴⁷ Tuozzo's explanation of the addition of *tôn allôn epistêmôn* is that the knowledge of all knowledges is meant to provide the standard of value by which to govern all of the subordinate knowledges, and hence that Critias' addition need not be a source of "embarrassment", but rather is easily explicable on the basis of his position as a whole (Tuozzo, *Greetings*, 304-305). I must confess that this interpretation ultimately fails to convince: Critias is in fact unable to explain how the knowledge of all knowledge is also knowledge of the good. Knowledge of the good is not knowledge of the epistemic form, but rather knowledge of content – that is of significance, benefit, etc. Critias does assert that self-knowledge, knowledge of knowledge and knowledge of the good are one and the same thing (or at least one whole made up of fully integrated parts), but the entire second half of the dialogue is occupied with showing how this assertion eventually contradicts itself when each of its elements is investigated.

⁴⁸ Cf. 169d 7-8, 170b9, 172b1-c2.

Certainly, he said, and surely that is the conclusion, Socrates. For if someone has a knowledge that itself recognizes itself (*ei gar tis echei epistêmên hê autê gignôskein*) he himself would be of the same sort as what he has. Just as when someone has swiftness he is swift and when beauty he is beautiful and when cognition (*gnôsin*) he is cognizant (*gignôskôn*), so that when someone has the cognition itself of itself (*gnôsin autên autês*) then he will surely be cognizant himself of himself (*gignôskôn pou autos heauton*). (169d9-e5)

This is, of course, a straight *non-sequitur* unless the man in question happens to be of the same nature as “that which has cognition itself of itself”, or Critias’ reflexive knowledge. The examples he employs suffice to point out the fallacy. Swiftness is the *body’s* ability to move quickly and hence the body “having” swiftness is swift. Beauty is the beautiful form *of the body*, and hence the body having the beautiful form is beautiful. But the reflexivity of Critias’ *epistêmê*, which Socrates is asking about, is of that *epistêmê* with regard to itself, not necessarily of the soul with regard to itself. It is not at all obvious that when we know something we thereby also *know* ourselves.⁴⁹ We may certainly say that we are self-conscious or self-aware but it is difficult to see how this is transformed into self-*knowledge* unless the soul can be said either *to be knowledge*, that is, identical with the activity of knowing, or identical with the *mathêmata* which it knows.

But this, in a sense, is Critias’ point. He seeks to justify the sophistic dictum that man is the measure by insisting that the science of man is the key to knowledge of the whole. His assimilation of knowledge of oneself into the comprehensive knowledge expresses his confidence that there is a single *logos* which encompasses both the activities of the knower and the objects of knowledge in such a way as to provide

⁴⁹ See Rosen, *Sophrósune and Selbstbewusstsein*, 98. Cf. Tuckey, 50.

theoretical precision and practical guidance. Hence there is no resistance, but rather willing complicity, to Socrates' shift from self-recognition to *epistêmê*.

For Socrates, on the other hand, the identification of virtue with knowledge is far from unproblematic. The theoretical difficulty with which the Socratic position is confronted can be stated quite simply: If virtue is to be identified with knowledge or at least grounded in knowledge, then so long as we cannot reflexively certify that our knowledge is in fact knowledge, the very possibility of virtue, to say nothing of the unity of the virtues, becomes radically questionable. The virtuous man would seem to be reduced to the level of the craftsman in the *Apology* who performs his work well but is ultimately unable to give an account of the significance of his technical efficacy since he lacks knowledge of the "greatest things" (*ta megista*).⁵⁰ This conclusion is particularly damning for the Socratic philosopher to the extent that he ultimately identifies virtue not with any specialized moral *technê*, but with the philosophical search for comprehensive knowledge which transcends any specialization. The possibility of knowledge seems to implicate immediately the possibility of the virtues, whether understood singly or as a whole. Socrates, then, has his own compelling interest in broadening the discussion from self-recognition to *epistêmê*.⁵¹

This, however, only serves to raise the question of how scientific knowledge and self-awareness can be combined in a single account. Knowledge is a capacity or pathos

⁵⁰ *Ap.* 22d7.

⁵¹ Tuckey, 42ff.

of the soul which somehow makes it possible for intelligibility to be present to us. But how can the grasp of this capacity be like the grasp of other objects, whether theoretical or practical, without objectifying the capacity? Again, the question here is not whether self-awareness and the determinate grasp of some *mathêma* can be present together in a single consciousness, at least as far as Socrates is concerned. However, his summary of the discussion at 167a1ff leaves it deeply ambiguous whether there is in fact a single *logos* which unites all of the abilities he mentions, such as self-recognition, knowledge of ignorance and knowledge of any particular thing (not to mention knowledge of the good).

Socrates also gives an anticipatory hint as to why he thinks that the perfection of the soul is not achieved in a comprehensive discursivity by his quiet addition of non-knowledge (*anepistêmosunê*) to the summary definition at 167a6-7. If self-recognition were knowledge of knowledge (as Critias assumes) then the whole issue of knowledge of ignorance need not arise for the *sôphrôn*, since possession of the knowledge of all other “knowledges” and of itself would be coeval with the eradication of ignorance. Ignorance would simply be a function of forgetting or of having not yet become *sôphrôn*, viz., not having completely thought through every moment in the circle of *epistêmê tôn allôn epistêmôn*. Once this is done, however, the problem of ignorance is no longer acute.

There is no hint, in Socrates’ summary, of the possibility that the sound-minded individual will ever be completely purged of *anepistêmosunê*. Quite the contrary, part of his being sound-minded is his awareness of the permanent presence of ignorance within

himself. Socrates reestablishes the link between sound-mindedness and reflection on man's limits. The reflection on limit, in fact, is the ground for man's further ability to learn and to investigate others. To depart from close analysis of the text for a moment, ignorance, qua the separation between man and the whole of knowledge can be said to be a condition of making the whole visible in the first place. We can see the whole toward which we are working only by virtue of our distance from it and this visibility of the whole is somehow a condition of our own self-recognition as well. But this means that it is not discursivity as such, or a determinate science, which completes man but *visibility*, namely, the visibility of intelligibility, which is necessarily *prior* in the theoretical order to the discursive or scientific account of that intelligibility. The strivings of the subject as a whole, including the striving for full rationality, must be *acted* upon and must be *open* to being acted upon, by the intelligible structure of nature before the act of *logon didonai* can begin.⁵² This derivative nature of human activity is what ultimately separates Socrates from Critias' identification of comprehensive knowledge with full self-knowledge.

The two different definitions of *sôphrosunê* at the end of the central section are in fact two different estimations of the philosophical status of individuality as a first principle. Critias' interpretation of the Delphic *Gnothi Sauton* is the full justification of the thymotic impulse which asserts the importance and value of the empirical

⁵² See Kosman, 208-210, on the "ontologically diaphanous" nature of the best, or most revelatory *logoi*.

individuality, of this person here, of *me*. In a way which strikingly anticipates Hegel, the significance of the individual and of individual self-knowledge lies in the (at least potential) *universality* of individual personality. The individual's self-understanding is the *archê* from which the completed circle of knowledge is supposed to unfold.

Critias' character demonstrates that the *eros tyrannos* in Books VIII and IX of the *Republic* is far from Plato's last word on the complex phenomenon of tyranny. *Eros tyrannos* is not only bodily desire or possessiveness run amok. Indeed, the Critias of our present investigation, the future leader of the Thirty, does not seem to manifest either characteristic. The salient characteristic of Critias is his love of mastery and honor, and this emerges from his confidence that the individual's assertion of his ultimate significance can be satisfied.⁵³ It can be satisfied because it can be philosophically justified. This is the basis of his claim to be not only master of himself but of all others – to be the true *polupragmatos*.

For Socrates, on the other hand, the insistence on the importance of knowledge of ignorance shows that the equation of virtue with knowledge (and consequently the unification of theory and practice) remains a problem, not an accomplishment. Philosophy is therefore a life lived in the light of this problem rather than its solution. The question of the possibility of philosophy becomes coeval with the question of whether it is possible or even sensible to continue to love knowledge of the whole while

⁵³ See Richard Velkley, *Freedom and the End of Reason: On the Moral Foundation of Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 70.

being aware that the individual is permanently separated from the whole by his inability to encompass it. This is indeed a precarious balance; perhaps it is even impossible.

But why should Plato allow the investigation of *sôphrosunê* to issue in a deadlock of these two positions? If, as some commentators have pointed out (correctly, in my view), there are resources in the dialogue from which to develop a non-epistemic, practical definition of *sôphrosunê* as the virtue of human self-awareness which forms the basis for living well, why is this road not taken?⁵⁴

It is not sufficient to state that Critias' character incapacitates him for such an investigation. This is certainly true as far as it goes, but, as Socrates says in the *Symposium*, the answer longs for a further question:⁵⁵ Why would Plato choose an unsuitable interlocutor? Or, stated differently: What is the point of an extreme study of moderation, which ends in failure, rather than a moderate one?⁵⁶

The answer to this lies, I submit, in the very nature of philosophy and in the nature of *epistêmê* as the object of philosophical effort. The desire to know is essentially extreme. Repeated invocations of the etymology of *philosophia* as love of wisdom are vacuous unless accompanied by serious reflection on the fact that love of wisdom, or the truth, implies *hatred* of falsehood, of "the lie in the soul".⁵⁷ Correlatively, the love of

⁵⁴ Hyland, Lachterman, and Schmid all make this point, as does Kosman.

⁵⁵ *Smp.* 204d8: "All' eti pothei, ephê, hê apokrisis erôtêsîn toiande..."

⁵⁶ The possibility of a moderate study is clearly demonstrated in Aristotle's analysis of the mean. Many interpretations of the *Charmides*, which endeavor to illuminate the strange, and seemingly arid, Socratic examination of Critias fail to raise this question.

⁵⁷ *R.* 382b1-5. On philosophical hatred cf. 485c4: "to pseudos alla misein" and 490b9-10.

truth points to the love of the whole truth. There is every reason to believe that, in Plato's considered judgment, a *logos* of the whole truth is impossible for the human being. However, prior to a critical demonstration of the impossibility of *Sophia* we must have clearly in view the absolute, or comprehensive, scope of rational eros. This scope cannot even begin to be understood without the perhaps unachievable, but still intellectually accessible, limit case of a comprehensive exclusion of falsehood or error. In short, I believe that Plato would agree with Hegel's insistence that partial knowledge by its very nature implicates, or points to the whole ("*Das Wahr ist das Ganze*").

I suspect that Plato allows the assimilation of recognition into determinate knowledge, and of *sôphrosunê* into the *epistêmê tôn allôn epistêmôn* in order to emphasize how close the Socratic and Critian, or philosophical and tyrannical, positions are. The tyrannical impulse to universalize the individual emerges from deep within the philosophical search for universal and unconditioned grounds and first principles.⁵⁸ From this "extreme" vantage point it becomes easier to see both what is involved in maintaining the aforementioned philosophical balance between comprehensive eros and the necessary finitude of human nature and how such a delicate balance is upset by beginning from where Critias begins. The account of philosophical sobriety, then, seems to require giving hybris its full due.

⁵⁸ Lachterman, 43: "Because the intricate formulae are put into the mouth of Critias, we are permitted to consider him as an antagonist whose views are to be examined meticulously and suspiciously; at the same time, the fact that these views are uttered in response to Socrates' promptings constrains us to consider them as genuine issues latent in....*epistêmê* and *aretê*."

Postscript

If my interpretation of the central section is at least partly correct, it should help to make some sense of the tortured examination which continues from 167a7 to the end of the work. A full explication, of course, is a task for a complete study of the *Charmides*. Within the present compass, I can do no more than show the most general outline.

The general drift of Socrates' examination consistently shows that Critias is unable to hold together knowledge (or recognition) of self, reflexive master knowledge and knowledge of benefit (or, the good). As Critias focuses his attention on one element, one or more of the others slips from view. A few limited examples will have to suffice.

Socrates' first approach to the problem is an investigation of the possibility of reflexive knowledge (leaving aside the question of benefit)(167b1). He appears to be asking one of two things: whether there is a kind of knowledge which is knowledge of our present activity of knowing, which would seem to refer to an immediate apperception of the activities of soul, or whether by means of reflection we can certify past acts of knowing to be *actual* knowledge. It is unclear exactly which is intended here though the balance of examples, especially those drawn from sensory perception (a kind of seeing (*opsis tis*) which sees itself, i.e. sees seeing, etc) lean towards the first possibility (167c8ff). While such reflexivity clearly appears impossible in some cases (arithmetic relations such as greater, lesser and the double), Socrates does not in fact deny it might be possible in the case of knowledge (168a10). He only states what would have to obtain in order for such a thing to be possible: "Won't whatever has its own power (*dunamin*)

with regard to itself also have that being (*ousia*) with regard to which its power is?" (168c10-d3). Socrates has already gotten Critias to agree that knowledge is normally of a certain learnable object, or *mathêma*, and that the knowledge of knowledge would be of no learnable object (*mathêmatos oudenos*) but of itself and the other "knowledges" (168a7). The question then becomes: in what sense is the activity of knowing a *mathêma*? If knowledge is the power, or *dunamis*, for learning knowable things, does the transformation of this power or activity into an intelligible structure, or *mathêma*, obscure its true *ousia*? If so, reflexive knowledge would be tantamount to self-alienation. The argument is never carried through to a conclusion and Socrates leaves it to "some great man" (*megalou...tinos...andros*) who will be able to decide it (169a1-2). However it should be clear that if in fact the activity of knowing is to be the object of a reflexive *dunamis* which must have the same *ousia* as its object, then, since the act of knowing is a movement out of ignorance, a coming to be of knowing, Critias' *epistêmê epistêmês* qua knowledge of both the activity of knowing and of the objects of knowledge must have a nature which combines presence with absence or determinacy with what Hegel might call negativity. It would have to be somewhat closer to *Geist* in its subjective aspect and not to *epistêmê* as this term is usually used in Greek thought.⁵⁹ This is further evidence that philosophical possibilities which seem to us uniquely Hegelian are being explored here.

⁵⁹ Rosen, *Sôphrosunê and Selbstbewußtsein*, 102.

Each time, however, the attempt to elaborate such possibilities leads to still more profound ambiguity. Even if we were able to establish the possibility of reflexivity, Socrates is still unwilling to identify such knowledge as *sôphrosunê* until, he says, "I investigate whether something that is of this sort would benefit us or not; for I do divine that sound-mindedness is something beneficial and good" (169b1-4). The true unity of theory and practice must account not only for theoretical precision and practical competence, but for the significance of these, for their goodness. Now, how would we show that this knowledge is a benefit or a good? To do so we would need to know the good, or something about the good and about ourselves as beings who can be benefited in this or that way. The reflexive knowledge of knowledge must encompass both knowledge of itself, of ourselves and of the good. Critias, however, is at a complete loss to explain how reflexive knowledge of itself and all knowledge, no matter the way we define it, could accomplish this. He is caught by perplexity (*halônai hupo aporias*) (169c6). Once again, the implication is that knowledge of one's self and scientific knowledge are incomplete without knowledge of the good while knowledge of the good is something radically different from either self-knowledge or determinate science.⁶⁰

Appropriately, then, the dialogue now turns to the issue of benefit but it does so by a circuitous route through the question of the scope of comprehensive knowledge and whether it allows its possessor to know only "that" something is knowledge or also of "what" it is a knowledge. Critias accepts Socrates' limitation of "knowledge of

⁶⁰ Oehler, *Noetischen und Dianoetischen Denken*, 7.

knowledge" only to the ability to pick out the form of knowledge, the ability to identify something as falling under the set "knowledge" (170a6). This however, would seem to reduce comprehensive knowledge to a kind of *technê* which tells us only whether something which claims to be a knowledge is in fact one. The end result of this investigation is the conclusion that since *sôphrosunê* is knowledge only of knowledge and not of any determinate subject matter, the *sôphrôn* cannot know any determinate subject, such as medicine. Worse, however, neither can the doctor *know* that he knows medicine, since medicine is an *epistêmê* and the doctor, unless he happens to also be a *sôphrôn*, does not know *epistêmai* but only sickness and health (170e-171a). Precision and comprehensiveness fall apart. The need for precision in each of the determinate *epistêmai* which are to be identified as *epistêmai* vitiates the drive to comprehensiveness by making it entirely abstract.

What is excluded here is the obvious case in which we know *somehow* that doctoring is about health although we are not ourselves doctors. The dialogue supplies us with proof (if any were needed) that such latent knowledge is possible. Critias is quite capable of telling Socrates that *iatrikê* is concerned with the healthful (170b3) even though he lacks any medical training and cannot give an account of the reflexivity of knowledge. It is not a single, master knowledge that made this possible but rather the awareness that we possess implicit knowledge which is nevertheless faulty or merely incomplete, when compared to the fuller grasp which the doctor possesses. This is a kind of self-recognition, a kind of noticing which gives some kind of access to

knowledge of a practical as well as theoretical nature since we call a doctor, and not a shoemaker, when we are sick and we are aware that one goes to medical school to become a doctor not an architect. But this self-awareness is not an *epistêmê* and is not similar in its nature to the determinate sciences. It is able to do what it does only because it allows us to note the difference between knowledge and ignorance, between our recognition of ourselves and the kind of knowledge which is involved in mastering a determinate science and craft. That is, it is dependent for its efficacy precisely on the fact that it is not a comprehensive *logos*. Critias, however, does not notice this capacity.

In the extremely intricate treatment after 171d1, Socrates attempts three times to understand what good or benefit would arise from Critias' *sôphrosunê*. For the sake of argument he even grants what he had previously denied: that there is a comprehensive knowledge in Critias' terms which allows for such practical mastery that a city could be conceived in which life would be lived without error (*anarmatêtoi*)(171d6). This knowledge, however, is not the same as knowledge of the *significance* of such mastery and is therefore unable to explain why it is good. This is linked to the other striking fact about the city ruled by *sôphrosunê* as Socrates describes it (171d6ff). Socrates explicitly states that it would not even be necessary for all people within that city to be sound-minded in order to enjoy the benefits of *sôphrosunê*, as Critias has tried to define it. It is sufficient for the *rulers* to have it. But this means that those who are not sound-minded, but are ruled by those who are, would still do beautifully (nobly) and well (*kalôs kai eu prattein*) even though they do not know themselves and do not know what they are

doing (171d1-172a5). We are right back at the result from which Critias had recoiled earlier, "But this, Socrates would never happen" (164c7). The comprehensive "knowledge of all other knowledges" which was supposed to be the full articulation of self-knowledge ends up by eliminating self-knowledge altogether.

Similarly, Socrates' second description, or "dream", of a city governed by *sôphrosunê* (173a7), makes reference to the needs, activities and goods of the body, not the soul. The only specifically psychic activity which is mentioned is *mantikê*, or prophecy, which would rule this city (173c3ff). And yet, the prophet too can only tell us the things which are to come (*tôn mellontôn*) and the fact *that* they will come, not whether it is *good* that they come. The city ruled by comprehensive *logos* leads to the loss both of self-consciousness *and* the good, exactly the reverse of what Critias had promised.

Sandwiched between these two accounts of the error-free city, however, is another, telegraphic attempt to discover the goodness of *sôphrosunê*. Socrates asks:

Does what we are now discovering sound-mindedness to be – having knowledge of knowledge and non-knowledge – have this good? That he who has it will learn more easily whatever else he learns and that everything will appear more distinct to him, since in addition to each thing he learns, he will behold, in addition (*proskathorônti*) the knowledge? And that he will examine others more beautifully about what he himself has learned, while those who examine without this will do it more weakly and poorly? (172b1-8)

Here the good of *sôphrosunê* is tied to the ability to learn and to the fact that for the one who possess what Tuckey calls this "knowledge of how to acquire knowledge", that is, how to think clearly, "everything will appear more distinct" (*enargestera.....phainetai*). This cannot but make one remember Socrates' earlier defense

of his own behavior, when accused by Critias of engaging in refutation *ad hominem* rather than looking to the *logos*:

So I do assert that this is what I am also doing now: investigating the argument most of all for the sake of myself, but perhaps also for my other companions. Or don't you suppose that it is a common good (*koinon agathon*) for almost all human beings that each thing that exists should become clearly apparent (*gignesthai kataphanes*) just as it is? (166d2-6)

This last passage is crucial and returns us to the earlier remarks about the closeness of Socrates and Critias. Self-knowledge and frankly egoistic self-concern *are* linked with the good, just as Critias had divined. But the good of the individual depends upon or derives from the "common good", the clear and distinct appearance of the beings, rather than the other way around. Critias' failure is rooted in his having reversed this order of priority, in eliminating the difference between interiority and exteriority or between the knowledge of the soul and knowledge of the objects of the soul's various capacities.⁶¹

There is, then, no denial of the reality of self-consciousness in the *Charmides* and no absence of interiority. Furthermore, we should be wary of any facile distinction between the "ancient" concern with perfection and the modern concern with "self-determination". Self-determination and perfection are *both* present within the *Charmides*,

⁶¹ This is also the flaw in Sprague's interpretation of *sôphrosunê* as a "second-order *technê*," Rosamund Kent Sprague, *Plato's Philosopher King* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 42. Knowledge of the good is not a *technê* at all. It underlies the significance of all *technai* and hence no single *technê* can be identified with it. David Roochnik's refutation of Sprague on this point seems to my mind to be definitive. See David Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1996), 122-123.

in the form of the disjunction between the self-knowing *sôphrôn* and the good. However vast the differences in emphasis, terminology and literary style, Plato and Hegel are indeed addressing a similar question: What is the relationship between wisdom and the individual's self-assertion and self-determination? As we saw in the first chapter, Hegel's treatment of the problem can be said to be a synthesis of Hobbes and Plato. On the one hand, he affirms Hobbes' insight that man's natural state is vanity and his primary natural desire is to exercise power over his surroundings. That is, man is not characterized primarily by sensory and intellectual openness to the whole but rather by his assertion of himself against it. *Pace* Hobbes however, *vanitas* and self-assertion are implicitly rational for Hegel in the sense that the development from the initial struggle for mastery to absolute reconciliation is a wholly internal, dialectical unfolding of what is already present in the earliest manifestations of subjectivity.

The *Charmides*, by contrast, is a kind of inverted, or *verkehrte* dialectic, a *decomposition* of the elements and this helps to account for the peculiarity of its structure. On the one hand, the various definitions of *sôphrosunê* move from an emphasis on externality toward a greater emphasis on interiority, on *sôphrosunê* as a kind of awareness or knowledge, and this transition becomes especially pronounced when Critias comes on the scene.⁶² And yet, the apex of this process, precisely the moment when Critias identifies *sôphrosunê* with "Know thyself" marks the beginning of a descent in the dialogue. Each definition of *sôphrosunê* advances to a higher level of philosophical

⁶² This curious fact was noticed by Lachterman, 93 and 122. And cf. Schmid, 40.

sophistication while in fact also being a step down, until we reach Socrates' chastisement of Critias: "Wretch! You have been dragging me around in a circle all along...." (174b11).

Socrates' "exasperation" is entirely justified by the course of the argument. Rather than an accumulation of moments leading to ever more comprehensive self-knowledge, the discussion shuttles back and forth between disjointed parts. These parts are, on the one hand, Critias' powerful thymotic concern with himself and with mastery over his fellows, and, on the other hand, his understanding that justification of his thymotic individualism can only be achieved through a comprehensive account of the whole in which man lives, acts and understands. Critias' speeches attempt to link these two by developing the comprehensive knowledge of all knowledges directly out the self-knowing and self-determining subject who immediately knows his own things and does them, and hence is entitled to give himself the law in a godlike fashion. He tries, in other words, to develop the universal out of the most radical particularity or privacy (=to *idios*). The putative development keeps foundering on the fact that the good, which is supposed to unite both the knowledge and the action of the *sôphrôn* in a comprehensive speech, is actually *presupposed* by that speech rather than developed as a moment within it. We have indeed been going in a circle, only it is not the circle of *epistêmê tôn allôn epistêmôn*, or wisdom.

The inverted dialectic of the *Charmides* reflects Plato's judgment that individuality cannot develop dialectically into a philosophic account of the good and

hence the whole. The true may indeed be the whole – fully articulated, complete unto itself, autonomous. The problem seems to be that the soul is not a whole, at least not in this sense.

CHAPTER 3

SYMPOSIUM: *Eros, Logos and Absolute Discourse*

The modern doctrine of subjectivity, especially in the German philosophical tradition from Kant through Hegel, stands or falls with the centrality of discursive thought in the process whereby experience is organized into a determinate structure or form. The role of discourse can be understood “phenomenally” as Kant does, by distinguishing between sensuous intuition and conceptual understanding. Experience is thus phenomenal, a product of the transcendental, synthesizing activity of the conceptual, logical, and predicative capacities of *Verstand*. Alternatively, that role is “speculative” or “absolute” in the Hegelian sense of discourse as Absolute Knowledge which is meant to be the total manifestation of what is implied in the Platonic-Aristotelian identification of philosophy with *logon didonai*, the giving of accounts. I open this chapter with the preparatory suggestion that, for Plato, logos cannot have the same productive or constitutive capacity, and as a direct consequence, neither can the subject. As I shall try to show, the path to a fully discursive self-knowledge is blocked by the very nature of discursivity itself.

As far as the Platonic dialogues are concerned, there can, of course, be no doubt that we speak or, more precisely that we “speak about” or bespeak many things.⁶³ But what is at issue is the status of this capacity for “bespeaking”, a capacity which emerges from the “intentional” character of the soul, its addressing itself or being-directed to the

⁶³ On the link between logos, *dianoia* and the inner dialogue of the soul with itself, which is the paradigm for the “external” dialogue of one soul with another, see *Sph.* 263e3-5.

world. Considered in Platonic terms, the question of logos therefore conveys us directly to *eros* since one of the fundamental modes of directedness to a world is desire. To put the point quite simply, we talk about the things we want and we want in a marvelously wide variety of ways.

The theme of the *Symposium* is of course eros and it is commonly treated as a praise of eros. This is an interpretation which, while not entirely inaccurate, is seriously insufficient. While the interlocutors in the dialogue begin from the certainty that eros is a great and praiseworthy god, it quickly becomes apparent, especially for Diotima, that eros is in need less of praise than of a diagnosis, and specifically a diagnosis as to how its intrinsically indeterminate or polymorphous character can be rendered determinate or stable. That logos, too, is implicated in this diagnosis becomes clear from a brief reflection on the various uses of the word in Greek.

The Liddell, Scott, Jones lexicon records no fewer than ten lexical categories for the word logos, themselves further divided into a plethora of sub-categories distinguished by very fine shades of meaning. These various meanings can be conveniently grouped into three general classes. First, and most frequently, logos signifies speech or verbal utterance, though usually in the sense of a phrase or a combination of several words; it is rarer to see logos used for the English "word".⁶⁴ If we then translate logos as speech, however, this only serves to emphasize the degree to

⁶⁴ See Arist. *De Int.* 16b26: "*Logos de esti phonê semantikê*." "Word" would usually be *onoma* or *rhêma*. For an exception, where logos refers specifically to a single word (in this case, the compound *diatribein*) see Arist. *Rh.* 1406a35-36.

which it is indeterminate. A speech qua account of something can embody the results of deliberation and calculation (*logismos*) and indeed, in the *Odyssey*, the verb *legein* is sometimes used to mean “to count, or reckon”.⁶⁵ Logos need not have this sense, however. It might mean narrative, story or even fable, as in Herodotus’ references to Croesus’ tale (*logon*) of the flute player and the fishes or Cebes’ reference to the fables of Aesop (*tous tou Aisôpou logous*) in the *Apology*.⁶⁶ It can also mean rumor, as in the Heraclitean fragment, “the fool loves to become excited at every report” (*blax anthrôpos epi panti logoi eptoêsthai philei*) or a plea or pretext used in court, where the concern is less with truth than with victory, as in the accusation that Socrates had the diabolical gift for *ton hettô logon kreittô poiôn* – making the weaker argument, or speech, stronger.⁶⁷

The second general set of meanings refers not to the various spoken utterances as such, but more exactly to that which the utterances are *about*, their content. Hence, logos can mean “measure”, as in the “common measures” which must be established in the city, according to the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*.⁶⁸ Even more directly, it can be translated by the Latin *ratio*, or proportion.⁶⁹ Logos can also denote the “reason” or ground for the existence of other things, or the principle(s) embodied in some thing, act or speech, e.g. the Aristotelian definition of *technê* as the *hexis meta logous alêthous poiêtikê*

⁶⁵ *Od.* IV.452 and IX.335.

⁶⁶ *Hdt.* I.141 and *Phd.* 60d1ff.

⁶⁷ Heraclit., DK 87 and *Ap.* 18b8.

⁶⁸ *Lg.* 746e.

⁶⁹ On *logos arithmôn*, or mathematical proportion, see Aristotle’s discussion of the Pythagoreans at *Metaph.* 985b32 and cf. Aristoxenus, *Harmonica*, 32, and esp. Euclid, *Elementa* V, def. 3-5.

– the active state of production accompanied by true logos, which obviously refers not merely to speech, but the principles which distinguish skill from luck and the expert from the Sunday driver.⁷⁰

There is, finally, a third sense of logos which, while later than Plato, is crucial for understanding the philosophical problematic with which he is grappling; viz., logos as divine wisdom. Logos in this sense can be embodied in the *word* of God by which the world is created (as it is in Philo) but it can also simply identified with Christ or even with God himself (as it is in the famous opening passage of the Gospel of John).⁷¹ The crux of the matter is that logos understood as divine obliterates the difference between logos as account and logos as that *of which* there is an account. In a manner analogous to the Kantian *intellectus archetypus*, the *logos tou theou* creates those things which it bespeaks in the very act of speaking them.

A brief remark is in order here about what is doubtless the most famous and, in many respects, the most penetrating recent meditation on the meaning of logos and on Platonic logos specifically. I refer of course to Heidegger. Without entering upon a comprehensive interpretation of Heidegger, I note only the following salient point: For Heidegger, Plato represents a watershed in the movement of Greek thinking away from

⁷⁰ Aristotle, *EN* 1140a10.

⁷¹ *Ev. Jo*, 1.1-4: *En archê ên ho Logos, kai ho Logos ên pros ton Theon, kai Theos ên ho Logos...panta di'autou egeneto, kai chôris autou egeneto oude hen* [emphasis mine]. The logos is both with God and yet is God. For logos in Philo, see *De Opificio Mundi* I:24 in which the *noêton kosmon* is nothing else than *theou logon* and *De Cherubim*, I, 162 (127) on *logon theou* as the instrument of creation, *di' hou kateskeuasthê* [sc. *ton kosmon*]. On the identification of *sophia* and *logos* in Philo cf. *Legum Allegoriarum*, lib. I, 56 (65): *tês tou theou sophias, hê de estin ho theou logos*. The Philo references are to the Mangey pagination in the Loeb edition, edited by Colson and Whitaker.

logos, in its more original and pre-discursive sense as “collecting, gathering or counting”. According to Heidegger, pre-Socratic philosophy (and especially Heraclitus) was able to preserve the distinction between the assertoric, discursive sense of *legein* as judgment and *logos* as the original collection or “gatheredness” of beings which Dasein first encounters and only then tries to bespeak. Hence, Heraclitus, in fragment DK 1, teaches that:

Logos is always, but human beings become uncomprehending both before they have heard and after they have heard for the first time. For all things come to be according to this logos (*ginomenôn pantôn kata ton logon tonde...*), yet they [men] appear like those who have no experience, they try with words (*epeôn*) and with deeds (*ergôn*) which resemble the ones I exhibit, distinguishing each thing according to its nature....

Heraclitus distinguishes the *logos* of things which he is going to exhibit (and which Heidegger identifies with *phusis* and Being) from the various faltering attempts we make to grasp and articulate it. Logos as speech, as the arrangement of words (*epea*), follows upon or is under the sway of logos as the articulated nature of Being itself, which is an “originary gathering, not a heap or pile where everything counts just as much and just as little – and for this reason rank and dominance belong to Being” (and consequently, we may add, not to logos as *Urteilen*).⁷²

In Plato, however, and with still greater finality in Aristotle, the original sense of logos gives way to the propositional or assertoric sense, the *logos apophantikos* which

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, Conn: Yale-Nota Bene Press, 2000), 141. See the entire section on logos and Being, pp. 131-156 in *passim*.

arrogates to itself an independent status, “standing over” Being and saying or predicating things about it (*ti kata tinous*). This transformation is coeval with the covering over, or concealing of the question of Being and hence the decline of Western metaphysics. Man ceases to be the animal possessed by the logos of nature (*phusis=logos anthrôpon echon*) and becomes the Aristotelian “animal possessing logos” (*anthrôpos=zoon logon echon*) as a tool for the accomplishment of his projects.⁷³

Whatever else may be said of other Platonic dialogues, I hope to show that as far as the *Symposium* is concerned, Heidegger is mistaken. There is no independent “subjective” status to logos in this dialogue; quite to the contrary, the *Symposium* assigns it to the curious, *intermediate* realm along with eros. The question which emerges from a close study of the dialogue is rather, if (and how) the first sense of logos as speech can be made to approach as closely as possible to its second sense as *ratio*, proportion, or principle without invoking a purely divine logos which combines the two.⁷⁴ Thinking

⁷³ Ibid., 187.

⁷⁴ I add here a further remark on Heidegger’s critique of Christian logos. Heidegger argues that the reason for the divergence between the archaic Greek and Christian senses of logos ultimately derives from the fact that, in the Septuagint and the New Testament, logos serves as the Greek translation for the Hebrew דיבר (word, utterance, speech) as in עשרת הדיברות (the Ten Commandments) or וידבר ה' אל משה לאמור (“And God spoke to Moses saying...”). In other words, for Heidegger, the Christian interpretation of logos as it appears in the Bible and the Fathers has lost completely the original sense of a “gatheredness” of the beings which precedes speech. Logos becomes exclusively speech, mediator or messenger (Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 143). He is of course absolutely correct in noting that “a whole world separates” Heraclitus from the conception of logos in the synoptic Gospels and in John, but this is not because logos has been reduced to its discursive or predicative meaning. It is rather because it has been elevated from discourse which is merely *about* the gatheredness of beings into the discourse which *gathers* all beings together *in principio*. One might consider the traditional benediction which begins the reading of Psalms in a Jewish morning service:

through this problem as it appears in the dialogue will take us a considerable distance toward understanding what I claim is Plato's self-conscious rejection of the possibility of an "Absolute" discursivity which fully articulates the unity of subject and object.

Diotima in context

No minimally competent reader of the *Symposium* can fail to notice how Diotima incorporates something from each of the previous speakers while at the same time subtly transforming their positions. Phaedrus' praise of love from the point of view of the passive and self-interested beloved is preserved in the imbalance between the erotic initiate and the "beautiful itself" (*auto to kalon*) which is loved but does not love in return. Pausanias is concerned mainly with the elegance of technique rather than nobility and baseness, since, as he asserts, nothing is noble or base in itself (180e5).⁷⁵ However, he also brings to light the paradoxical combination of cunning hunter and self-effacing slave (183a1ff and 184b6-8) so characteristic of erotic possession and later emphasized in the description of the child of Poros and Penia. Eryximachus is the first speaker to understand that eros rules not only in the souls of men but is a cosmic phenomenon present in all things (*en pasi tois ousi*)(186a3-7), thus prefiguring Diotima's own discussion of eros as the bond of the whole (202e7).

ברוך שאמר והיה עולם – literally, "Blessed is He who spoke and there was a world."

This constitutive sense of biblical speech is decisive for the later trajectory of European philosophy certainly through Hegel, and I would argue, Heidegger himself.

⁷⁵ Except where noted otherwise, all Stephanus numbers in this chapter refer to the *Symposium*.

It is also clear, however, that the speeches of Aristophanes and Agathon have a particular pre-eminence which Plato emphasizes in several ways, most famously at the end of the work, where only these two speakers remain awake to talk with Socrates (223c4). They somehow approach nearer than the others to the perfect wakefulness for which the philosopher strains every nerve of his being.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Socrates promises to relate Diotima's speech "on the basis of what was agreed on by myself and Agathon" (201d6-7) and he admits that he began his education believing many of the same things Agathon had (201e3-5). Finally, Diotima explicitly mentions and refutes only Aristophanes' claim that love is for one's lost other half (205d10ff).⁷⁷ Her speech, then, is meant to somehow incorporate the insights of Aristophanes and Agathon while also transcending them.

We begin with a remark on some tensions in Aristophanes' speech. On the one hand, he promises to speak in a manner different from either Eryximachus or Pausanias (189c2-3) and to take only Eryximachus as an example, the change in tone and content is indeed unmistakable. Aristophanes replaces the latter's materialist account of eros as the science of "filling and emptying" (186c7) with an appreciation of its distinctly *human*

⁷⁶ Regarding philosophical wakefulness, see Diogenes Laertius on the sleeping habits of Aristotle: Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum*, V, 1, 16: "...and whenever he would go to sleep, a bronze sphere was placed in his hands, with a vessel lying underneath, so that when the sphere fell from his hand into the vessel, he would be awakened by the noise."

⁷⁷ It is this claim which Aristophanes was about to try and defend when Alcibiades crashes the party (212c5).

significance.⁷⁸ However, while the comprehensiveness of desire is preserved in Aristophanes' claim that eros is the desire and pursuit of the whole (*tou oun holou tē epithumia kai diôxei erôs onoma*) (192e10-193a1), the whole to which he refers is the primeval unity of our human nature, our *archaia phusis*, understood exclusively in terms of the body, just as it was in the case of Eryximachus.

Aristophanes' eros is not a god nor is it correct to say that eros is the divine gift or *mechanê* devised by Zeus at 191b6. According to his myth, the two parts of the primeval human being that have been sliced apart already have an immediate desire to grow together again as soon as the cutting takes place and *before* Zeus gets around to the idea of turning their genitals round to the front in order to allow intercourse and generation in one another (191a5). Originally, then, erotic desire is separate even from the greater whole of implied by reproduction and family. Sexual intercourse and generation are said to originate in Zeus' pity. The half-humans who have been sliced apart, being desperate to become one again, were unwilling even to eat or drink and hence died off; the "device" of sexual reproduction is supplied by Zeus as a salve for these sufferings. And yet, Aristophanes hints that all this has more to do with Olympian self-pity than philanthropy: the wholesale death of the human race would involve a considerable practical inconvenience for the gods, namely, the loss of the sacrifices on which they depend, which is why Zeus elected not to destroy humanity in the first

⁷⁸ His speech is a *historia peri anthropinês phuseos*, an inquiry into human nature, in the thinly veiled guise of a praise of eros, as Aristophanes himself intimates at 189d5.

place.⁷⁹ Eros is less a cure, than a consequence of our bodily affliction, a cunning ruse in the service of divine self-interest. It cannot point the way to the natural whole since “our present nature” grants no access to the truth of things. On the contrary, our present nature is not natural at all; it is a divine artifice erected precisely as an impassable barrier to any erotic satisfaction other than the bodily. Aristophanes, for example, twice uses variations of the word *kosmos* in his speech, not in order to indicate any consonance between human and cosmic nature or to any directedness of the former toward the latter, but rather to emphasize the necessity of piety.⁸⁰ It was, after all, the “great thoughts” (*megala phronemata*) of the primeval circle-men which led to their attempt on the gods (189b6) and Zeus subsequent decision to split them in two. In Aristophanes, “orderly” or pious behavior toward the gods is coeval with the acceptance by *psuchê* of its subjection to a maimed bodily nature. Despite his assertion to the contrary, then, Aristophanes remains under the influence of Eryximachus. At 191c6, for example, Aristophanes says that homosexual intercourse has the virtue of at least allowing the lovers “satiety in their being together” (*sunousia*) so that they can turn again to the work of life. “Satiety” translates *plêsmônê* – exactly the term used by Eryximachus to describe

⁷⁹ 191b5ff and cf. with 189c1ff.

⁸⁰ 1904-5: Apollo is ordered to turn the face and neck of the human being to the front where he can observe the wound left by Zeus’ cut, and thus become more orderly (*kosmiôteros*). And at 193a4ff we are warned that if we do not behave in an orderly (*kosmioi*) fashion to the gods, we will be sliced in half again “like dice”. Particularly insightful on this point is Gerhard Krüger in his work *Einsicht und Leidenschaft: Das Wesen des Platonischen Denkens* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1948), 124-125. As Krüger notes, the original three genders of circle-men are the offspring (*ekgonon*) of the heavenly bodies (sun, earth and moon)(190b2) and as such must have a perfect, spherical form. There is a correspondence between them and the cosmos which is lost completely when we turn to “our present nature”.

erotics as the science of filling up and emptying of bodies (*tou somatos...plêsmonên kai kenôsin*)(186c7). Aristophanic eros remains shackled to body even as it tries to point to possibilities beyond it.⁸¹

The deeper difficulty in Aristophanes, however, from which the subjection of soul to body results, is that eros in his myth is almost entirely inarticulate. The lovers may wish to spend their whole lives together, but,

....they cannot say what they want to get from one another. No one would be of the opinion that it is sexual intercourse (*tôn aphrodisiôn*), as if it was for the sake of this that each rejoices in being with the other in such great earnest, but it is something else that the soul of each clearly wants, but is unable to say, rather prophesying what it wants and speaking in riddles. (192c2-d2)

The ability to put into words what the lovers want is, like eros, a gift of the gods and specifically of Hephaestus who gives voice to their desire to be fused together into one body. The choice of Hephaestus to address the lovers, rather than, for example, Apollo, who is often identified with consciousness or Athena, who is identified with wisdom is not accidental.⁸² The bodily union with one's lost half, which eros seeks, cannot be accomplished by the characteristic powers associated with either Athena or Apollo; it would require yet another divine *mechanê* and hence it is fitting that Hephaestus is the one "standing over them, with his tools (*organa*)" (192d3). Just as eros does not point beyond the individual human being to the cosmos it also fails to issue in rational speech or logos.

⁸¹ Krüger, 130. And cf. Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 126 and 140.

⁸² See Krüger, 29.

Diotima's later denial that there is love of the whole unless the whole can also be called good (205e2-3), illuminates Aristophanes' difficulty. He cannot identify the true whole because he cannot identify goodness with anything other than bodily wholeness, and this is obviously insufficient as an explanation of the phenomena. As Diotima points out, a man is willing to cut off his own limbs if he considers them bad. It is not wholeness as such which is lovable, but goodness. Or rather, a man may cut off his own limbs and even, in some cases, give up life itself, because he has a conception of goodness which transcends and is more comprehensive than mere bodily wholeness: "Each does not cling to his own, unless someone calls the good his own and the bad alien, for men do not love anything but the good" (205e6). The inadequacies of Aristophanes' account force upon Diotima the question of whether eros has access to a whole which is truly good and not merely private. She must either show how this is possible or find herself implicated in Aristophanes' predicament: eros becomes restricted to the perspectival or private good, there being no standpoint from which this identification can be seen to be only a perspective.

We turn now to Agathon and the task of understanding what Socrates means by saying that he will relate Diotima's speech "based on what has been agreed to by Agathon and myself" (201d6-7). The first and perhaps most obvious sense relates to the results of the cross-examination of Agathon at 198c3-201c9, viz., that eros is the desire for something which it lacks and hence, if eros is of the beautiful (as Agathon insists) it eros cannot itself be beautiful (200e7ff). In fact, the conclusion does not quite follow, at

least not in the strong sense to which Agathon is made to agree. Eros may itself be beautiful now and desire to preserve its beauty in the future, as Socrates pointed out with regard to the case of someone already healthy and strong (200d1ff), but it does restrict Diotima's speech to the horizon of concern with the beautiful.

The second sense in which Socrates can be said to speak "on the basis" of the agreement with Agathon has to do with the status of rhetoric. Socrates roundly criticizes Agathon for giving a "fair and varied speech" (198b3) in which all good things are attributed to eros without regard for truth (198e2-3). Agathon is quite content for each speaker to appear (*doxei*) to praise eros (198e4).⁸³ Otherwise stated, he is censured because of his concern with rhetorical effect rather than truth. But this in no way implies that Socrates is blind to the need for rhetoric. Significantly, in contrasting his own understanding of praise with Agathon's, he does not demand that one tell the *whole* truth about eros, but only that one pick out (*eklegomenous*) the most beautiful (*ta kallista*) of the true attributes and *arrange* those in the most fitting (*euprepestata*) manner (198d3-6). Socrates, too, is aware of the need for "arrangement", then. Firstly, of course, he must marshal his rhetorical power simply to accommodate himself to Agathon's poetic gifts, which have overwhelmed the little *polis* of Athenians gathered at the party.⁸⁴ But as Diotima's education of young Socrates demonstrates, rhetoric is intrinsic to

⁸³ Cf. Republic 357a5-b2 on the distinction between persuading and appearing to persuade.

⁸⁴ R.G. Bury, in his commentary on 212c4-5 notes that only "some" applauded Socrates, while Agathon enjoyed the loud applause of everyone present (*pantas anathorubêsai tous parontas*) (198a1-2). Socrates, according to Bury, appeals only to those with ears to hear. See R.G. Bury, *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 134.

philosophical pedagogy as well. Socrates is not yet capable of understanding how *eros* is an intermediate “daemon” which binds the whole together. Upon hearing this from Diotima, he asks the most human of questions: “Who are his father and mother?” (203a9). In other words, he too required an image, a humanly comprehensible birth story.⁸⁵ Philosophical speech must accommodate itself to the all-to-human dependence on *muthos*, of which Agathon is an acknowledged master, while trying to purify it into a *logos*.

Finally, in addition to introducing beauty as a central theme of the discussion, Agathon makes two crucial claims which explain his position as a bridge between Aristophanes and Diotima. First, he identifies the wisdom of *eros* with *poiêsis*, and argues that man partakes of the divine through imitating the creative power by which the whole world is made. And yet, it is not primarily sexual reproduction which concerns him, but the various arts such as archery, medicine, divination, music. It is only on account of these that man is held in high repute (*ellogimos*)(197a5ff). Agathon’s *eros* is primarily a *psychic* rather than physical desire – a manifestation of the uniquely human concern with reputation. In this sense, he is indeed higher than Aristophanes, prefiguring the central role of (*philotimia*) in Diotima’s own teaching, where it is the first erotic manifestation which distinguishes men from the beasts (207c2-3).

⁸⁵ As R.E. Allen notes in his commentary to the dialogue, a description of someone’s parents was a “regular feature of encomia” and hence would be something familiar to the young Socrates. *The Symposium*, translated by R.E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 49.

Together with his emphasis on *psuchê* and *poiêsis*, Agathon also distinguishes between Eros and Necessity (*anankê*) and here there is a difficulty. Eros, he claims, takes no part in the wars, bindings, and castrations which are chronicled by Hesiod and Parmenides. All of that precedes the rule of eros; it “belongs to Anankê, not Eros”, if it is true at all (195c3).⁸⁶ Once eros is “king of the gods” (195c6), all good things come to be (197b9). Clearly, however, necessity does not disappear. The body, for example, remains entirely under its rule, prone as it is to ugliness, over which we have precious little control, and old age which comes upon us “swifter than is necessary” (195b2-3). Eros may flee old age (195b1) and be “perpetually” at war with ugliness (196a6-7), but since we must all submit to the necessary ugliness of aging and death, it does not really appear that psychic eros, no matter how creative, ever rules over necessity. The monarchy of eros is coeval with the sundering of the whole into two realms – one which is young, beautiful and freely creative and the other old, ugly and compulsory. Agathon does not explain how the two are mediated, a failure which derives from the fact that Agathon’s own conception of *poiêsis* has no necessary connection with knowledge or the ability to give an account of itself. *Poiêsis* is a power, a kind of inspiration bestowed indiscriminately, by the mere touch of eros, even on those who were previously bereft of the Muses (*amousoi*) (196e2-3).⁸⁷ It resembles the inspiration of the poets criticized by Socrates in the *Apology*, who are able to make marvelous things but are unable to explain

⁸⁶ Cf., 197b7 on *tên tês Anankês Basileian*.

⁸⁷ Cf. with Socrates’ comments to Agathon at 175d5ff.

how they do so.⁸⁸ Agathon, then, cannot explain either how we judge our *poiêmata* to be good or the relationship which obtains between erotic creativity and necessity. He is an advance over Aristophanes by dint of elevating psychic over bodily eros, but this comes at the cost of accepting the disintegration of the whole into the fixed oppositions of beauty/ugliness, youth/age, and eros/necessity, thus relinquishing Aristophanes' insight that eros is desire for the whole.⁸⁹ Here, in sum, is Diotima's task: Aristophanes' eros for the whole must be combined with Agathon's eros for the beautiful, as a conscious, psychic capacity in such a way as to make it articulate and rational.

Eros as Intermediary

The first stage in Diotima's sublation of her two predecessors is the description of eros as a "great daemon" located between the divine and the mortal (202d13-e1). As the importance of this passage cannot be overstated, I quote it in full. The *dunamis* of the daemonic realm is said to consist of:

Interpreting (*hermêneuon*) and ferrying (*diaporthmeuon*) to the gods the things of human beings and to human beings the things of the gods; from the ones, entreaties and sacrifices and from the others commands and recompense for sacrifices, and being in between both it fills up the interval between them, so that the whole itself (*to pan auto*) is bound together (*sundedesthai*) by it. Through this proceeds divination and the priestly art concerning sacrifices and rituals and spells as well as all divining and witchcraft. For god does not mingle with human being, but through this is the whole intercourse and dialogue (*dialektos*) of

⁸⁸ *Ap.* 22b8-c3.

⁸⁹ The superiority of Agathon's eros to Aristophanes, and in a sense, to all of his predecessors, is expressed in the fact that he is the first to introduce beauty as the object of eros. He thus raises the sights of eros and prepares the way for Diotima's own teaching. I owe this insight to comments by David Roochnik on the present chapter.

gods and men, both in waking and asleep.⁹⁰ And the one who is wise (*sophos*) concerning such things is a daemonic man, but the one who is wise in any other thing concerning the arts or crafts is vulgar.⁹¹ And these daemons are many and varied, and one of them is Eros. (202e3-203a8)

There are several peculiarities in this description, which can be addressed by two principal questions: First, how are we to understand the emphasis on speech as the intermediary between the parts of the whole? And, secondly, how, precisely, does the daemonic “fill up” the interval and bind the whole together? We begin by noting an important similarity with Aristophanes. Exactly as in the myth of the circle-men, Diotima assumes no natural friendship between gods and men (though, as if to moderate Aristophanes’ pessimism, she also mentions no necessary antagonism between them). At most, the relation is what Aristotle would call a friendship for the sake of utility.⁹² If “god and man do not mingle”, however, Diotima’s premises would seem to lead inescapably to Aristophanes’ conclusion: man must foreswear any proud thoughts, about the heavens or anything else. In Diotima’s case, however, there is a decisive difference: We saw that eros in Aristophanes is a “guide and general” (*hêgemon kai stratêgos*) in piety (*eusebein*) (193a8-b2) only by reconciling man to his imperfect nature as a half, or token, human being, not by reconciling man with the gods. Diotima,

⁹⁰ This sentence is extremely difficult to translate, as it does not appear that the participles can be construed either with gods or with men, without at least some supplement or alteration in Burnet’s text (such as the one conjectured by Badham). I have largely followed the sense of Benardete’s translation. For a good analysis of the grammatical difficulties, see Bury’s note, p. 99.

⁹¹ Benardete renders *banausos* as “vulgar and low” while Allen translates it as “a mere mechanic”, which nicely brings out the sense of the word as an epithet for the lower, or what the Critias of the *Charmides* might call, the disgraceful *technai*.

⁹² The recompense (*amoibas*) which Diotima mentions is presumably the answering of prayers in exchange for the human fulfillment of the divine “need” for the smoke of sacrificial victims.

by contrast, holds out the possibility that a man wise in daemonic things is somehow be wise regarding the whole (203a4-5).

The as yet amorphous nature of this wisdom is tied to the most significant point in Diotima's account: the *dunamis* of the daemonic realm is discursive and, what is more, without this *dialektos* there are only two separate parts which "do not mingle". To begin with, one should not too quickly assimilate this passage into the purportedly familiar "Platonic" dualism of particular instance of genesis and its eternal and unmoved form since, quite strikingly, the divine itself is in motion and it too has "things" which it needs from and ferries to the mortal realm. While one must be wary of pushing too hard against what is after all an image, I believe it is impossible to avoid drawing several inferences. The unity, or "binding together" of the divine and the human seems to require the effort of discursive mediation or interpretation, which is the link between parts whose distinctness is underlined by Diotima's use of the verb *diaporthmeuein* with its connotations of traversing distance (it is used, for example, for the ferrying of boats across a river).⁹³ At least as far as this passage is concerned, it is unclear whether what Diotima calls "the whole itself" (*to pan auto*) is eternal, "*auto kath' auto*" or the temporal product of a discursive power which, while simultaneously human and divine (the gods too are said to "converse" with man), receives its expression in *human* speech. In her account thus far, Diotima does not expand upon the nature of the divine, which still

⁹³ See Herodotus, I.205 and IV.141. Bury is correct to note (p. 98) that *hermeneuon* and *diaporthmeuon* are not synonymous.

hews closely to Olympian personal divinity. But her teaching is nevertheless decisively colored by a modern ambiguity: the realm of genesis, of which man is a resident, is not said to exist within an eternal and necessary whole and there is at least the implication that this whole, the *dialektos theois pros anthropous*, depends upon and is produced by the living, temporal power of discursivity.⁹⁴

What, after all, can Diotima possibly mean by saying that the whole is “bound together” by interpretative and dialogic speech, one form of which is erotic? Perhaps, this can become more understandable if we reflect on the full implications of the soul’s need to articulate its desires. Even to describe the object of desire is already to universalize it, qua particular example of this or that desirable quality or type. It is impossible, then, to engage even in the most preliminary consideration of our desires, to rank them and choose among them without already occupying a vantage point which is “above” or beyond them. To the degree that one strives for a more complete understanding of one’s desires, and then of the nature of desire simply, this vantage point must become correspondingly more comprehensive. The soul is the only part of

⁹⁴ *Mantikê* and all of the other arts proceed through or from it (*dia toutou*). I agree, then, with Rosen, 229 that Diotima’s account both accommodates itself too and revises the traditional Greek religion represented by Aristophanes. The revision seems to me very radical indeed and goes beyond even what Krüger mentions in his interpretation of this passage. For him, the main significance of the passage is in its abandonment of the pagan conception of the nearness of gods to men which allowed, *inter alia*, for the possibility of sexual generation between them. For Krüger, 152ff, this passage represents Diotima’s secularization or “de-sacralization” of the world (*Entgötterung der Welt*), but I believe he passes it by too quickly on his way to the genealogy from Poros and Penia. He is correct to note (p. 154) that eros plays the role of *sundesmos* here just as the Good does in the Republic (*R.*, 443d, 462b, 520a) and the Phaedo (*Phd.* 99c) but he does not tarry to draw the conclusions from this fact.

the whole which can not only bespeak its own desires, but also reflect on the phenomenon of desire in general, on its omnipresence. From this reflection, it is a short road to the divine, or at least “super-human” status not only of eros (as some of the other speakers in the *Symposium* in fact assert) but also of the logos by means of which the erotic being reflects on himself and then on everything else. The whole can be said to be whole only because of the being who is capable of bespeaking its wholeness.

Now we are prepared to see the subterranean link with Hegel. In Diotima as in Hegel, the reflection on logos points toward the unconditioned, comprehensive, and absolute ground of all particulars, what the Greeks would call *to pan*. But if man is that part of the whole which is able to understand and speak the whole, is it not then the case that the whole is necessarily *incomplete* until such time as speech and understanding have themselves been completed, until such time as the truly comprehensive, because fully comprehended, account has been “spoken” (i.e. grasped discursively in thought)? It is in just this sense that history, for Hegel, is necessary incomplete and, indeed, is not fully known *as history* until Spirit attains Absolute Knowledge. Consequently, the conclusion that the whole is produced or bound together, by discourse, while seemingly extreme, can be said to emerge from a deepening of ordinary, reflective life and thought.

However, Diotima indicates, in several ways, that the conclusion is in fact radically problematic and obscure. It is indeed difficult to understand what the nature of her “daemonic discursivity” might be. It is not simply demonstrative or conceptual logos (the word and its derivatives do not appear anywhere in this passage), but rather

something divinatory and even magical. It is not even necessarily related to wakefulness and hence to self-consciousness, since it is associated just as closely with sleep (203a4). How then, does it “fill up the interval”? The key to understanding the role of eros as an intermediary is to remember that it is presented early in Diotima’s speech, and thus early in Socrates’ education. To anticipate somewhat: her speech will strive to preserve the “daemonic” insight about the comprehensive status of eros while progressively purging it of any associations with discursive *construction*, that is, with the position according to which experience itself is a product of our power of speaking about it.

The Genealogy of Eros

Diotima now turns her focus from the daemonic in general to the nature of eros, which she endeavors to present in the more accessible guise of a genealogy:

When Aphrodite was born, all of the gods were feasting and among them Poros (Resource) the son of Mêtis (Intelligence).⁹⁵ And when they had eaten, Penia (Poverty) arrived to beg, as is customary at a feast – and she was hanging around the doors. Now, Poros being drunk on nectar – for there no wine yet – went into the garden of Zeus, heavy-headed and fell asleep. Now Penia, plotting (*epibouleuousa*), on account of her lack of resource (*aporia*) to make a child from Poros, lay down along side him and conceived Eros. (203b2-c1)

⁹⁵ See Hesiod, *Theogony* 886ff. Mêtis is the wife of Zeus. He is warned by Gaia and Ouranos that Mêtis’ descendants through Athena will overthrow him. In the Olympian version of a pre-emptive strike, Zeus swallows Mêtis in order that “the goddess would think for him both good and evil”.

That eros is the acolyte and servant (*akolouthos kai therapôn*) of Aphrodite is of course a fixture of traditional Greek accounts.⁹⁶ Platonic eros, however, in sharp contrast to Greek tradition, is no longer a blind servant, or unself-conscious power in which the lover loses himself. The desire of Penia for a child, like the desire of that child for wisdom, is *already* subjective – a desire for *self*-fulfillment.⁹⁷ Eros, after all, is not only the child of the drunk and unconscious Poros, he is also the grandson of Mêtis, whose name can be translated as intelligence, cunning, craft or skill. Platonic eros is self-conscious and self-aware, a new humanistic emphasis shared with the sophistic Enlightenment.⁹⁸

To begin to see what separates Plato from the enlightened conception, whether ancient or modern, of a sovereign and self-sufficient subject, we must confront what is without doubt the most peculiar element of the genealogical tale: the way in which the characteristics of eros are derived from each of his parents. As should be clear from the above passage, Penia was the instigator, the plotter and pursuer of the passive and pursued Poros. While one imagines that she might need to wake Poros in order to conceive eros, it goes without saying that he need not be sober or self-aware. On the one hand, then, “having his mother’s nature”, eros is:

...always poor (*penês*), and far from soft and beautiful, as the *hoi polloi* think, he is hard and squalid (dry) and shoeless and homeless, always lying on the ground

⁹⁶ In his note on p. 101 Bury mentions both Sappho and Hesiod as examples.

⁹⁷ Krüger, 50 and cf. also p. 182.

⁹⁸ Krüger, 52: “Es ist das Eigentümliche des Eros, daß seine personal Göttlichkeit die menschliche Besinnung, trotz des Enthusiasmus, nicht betäubt, sondern gerade wachruft.” See also *ibid.* 155-156 and 182. Krüger refers here, of course, specifically to Platonic eros.

without a blanket, sleeping in doorways and at roadsides, in the open air....always dwelling with need. (203c6-d3)⁹⁹

Thus far, the description is unexceptionable. The trouble starts when we turn to the properties of eros in accordance with his father (*kata ton patera*):

....he plots (*epiboulos*) to trap the beautiful and the good, being courageous, vigorous and eager, a cunning hunter, always weaving devices and desirous of practical understanding (*phronêseôs*) and resourceful, philosophizing throughout his whole life, a cunning magician, druggist, and sophist. (203d4-9)

This is indeed baffling. It is Penia who self-consciously plots (*epiboulousa*) to have a child.¹⁰⁰ And certainly if anyone is the courageous, device-weaving huntress in this story it is Penia who traps her prey in the very garden of Zeus himself. How, then, can Eros' plotting (*epiboulos*) to capture the beautiful and good, its skilled hunting, its courage and its eagerness be *kata ton patera*? If the various cognitive capabilities of eros are manifested in the wakeful mother, rather than the sleeping father, what does it mean to say that eros is a philosopher because "...he is of a wise and resourceful father, but of an unwise and resourceless mother" (204b6-7)? Must we simply acknowledge that, like Homer, Plato too occasionally nods off? Or perhaps the genealogy is after all only a

⁹⁹ The recurrences of "always" (*aei*) in this passage are quite striking. Diotima never asserts that eros has a form, but it does have a nature or power which manifests itself in the same way through time.

¹⁰⁰ As is clear even from the use of the verb *epibouleuein* with its link to *boulê* and *bouleusis* (deliberation, counsel, and advice).

myth, from which one should hardly expect deductive rigor. Neither of these remotely suffices as an explanation.¹⁰¹

Why, then, is the divine and wise asleep? At first glance, to say that wisdom involves the absence of self-consciousness (and hence of wakeful discourse) seems to make wisdom indistinguishable from death, the twin brother of sleep.¹⁰² However, this passage must be read together with Diotima's statement that "no one of the gods philosophizes nor does he desire (*epithumei*) to become (*genesthai*) wise – for he is so..." (204a1-2). In Diotima's re-conceptualization of the divine, *sophia* is present, but *epithumia* and *genesis* are not. It would seem to follow however, that *psuchê* must be denied to the divine, for how can there be *psuchê* where there is neither desire nor genesis?¹⁰³ To continue this line of thought, if the gods "have" wisdom or are wise, it is not clear how they can be *conscious* or aware of their wisdom, nor could they be happy by virtue of "possessing the good and the beautiful things" (202c10-11). The gods may be identified with the perfections of life, the *agatha kai kala*, but Diotima implies that they cannot have self-conscious life itself, that dialectical unity of perfection and defect. This however, comes very close to identifying the gods, not with the happy possessors of beauty and goodness, but with beauty and goodness, or perhaps with the intelligible forms, simply.

¹⁰¹ All other considerations aside, if it were actually the case that Plato is the kind of author who is not able to keep his affairs regular even so far as a single page of Greek then we are wasting our time with him. Acquaintance with the Platonic corpus seems to me a decisive refutation of this possibility.

¹⁰² On *Hypnos* and *Thanatos*, cf. *Il.*, XIV, 231 and XVI, 672-682.

¹⁰³ Cf. 207e2ff. Nor, without soul, could there be *nous*, q.v. *Ti.* 30b3.

But this only serves to stress the degree to which wisdom is divine, not human. *Completely* "satisfied" mind would be identical to the totality of intelligibles all at once, while the living mind can only think, or "possess", that totality *seriatim* or in time. Seen from the vantage point of a living, self-conscious, and inescapably erotic human mind, the perfect satisfaction which Diotima calls wisdom does appear equivalent to the loss of self-consciousness altogether. The Olympians are being quietly transformed such that they may be identified with the intelligible objects toward which eros and logos point, but with neither eros nor logos themselves.¹⁰⁴

If this interpretation is at all correct, the attribution of life, wakefulness, and intelligence to Poros instead of Penia is equivalent to the assertion that the intelligibility of erotic activity depends on what is both prior to it and essentially separate from it. Eros is understood not through itself, but only according to its ends and goals, which cannot themselves be erotic. The nature of Eros' mother, then, while self-conscious and articulate, does not render eros intelligible. The order of priority must be reversed. Eros becomes self-conscious and articulate, it becomes capable of speech, only as related to its intelligible objects, but these do not need to speak.

And indeed, in Diotima's account, eros taken in distinction from its objects is a deeply ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, the inheritance from the father is

¹⁰⁴ Rosen discusses this possibility, quite convincingly in my opinion, in his *Symposium*, 237-238. The Olympians make no further appearances in Diotima's speech after this point and play no role in the final and complete initiation into the mysteries of eros. Cf. the revision of myths in *Republic*, Book II, which has the same overall tendency of separating divinity and personality.

never entirely absent: "...that which is supplied to him is always flowing out so that Eros is never without resources (*aporei*) nor is he wealthy (*ploutei*)" (203e4).¹⁰⁵ This is what makes eros a philosopher. On the other hand, as Diotima implicitly admits in her criticism of Aristophanes, the mere fact of desire for the beautiful and/or good does not preclude being deceived about these things: ".....human beings are willing to have their own hands and feet cut off if it *appears* to them (*ean dokêi*) that their own is no good" (205e4-5). However, it is obvious that "one's own" may appear good, when in fact it is not. The variety of human types is such that not every erotic lover traverses the entire scale of objects up to the most comprehensive level. Many (most, perhaps) are necessary left behind, chasing what Diotima calls "much mortal nonsense" (*phluarias*) (211e3). Eros is prone to self-deception; what is more, it is a deceiver, a "magician (*goês*), druggist (*pharmakeus*) and sophist" (*sophistês*) (203d8). While eros can say that it wants, it does not necessarily know, by itself, what it truly wants.¹⁰⁶ The situation thus far is analogous

¹⁰⁵ One might expect Diotima to use the word *poros* instead of *ploutos* as the contrary of *aporei*, but then it would read: "Eros is never without resources nor does he have resources" and this is clearly not the case. Eros does have *some* resource, that is, some intimation of beauty, goodness or the other objects of its pursuit. What it does not have is the "heavy" fullness which is the lot of its sleeping father. A point somewhat along these lines is made by Plotinus in *Ennead* III, 5(9), 42-45: "And he is a mixed thing, having a part of need, in that he wishes to be filled, but not without a share of plenitude, in that he seeks what is wanting to that he already has; for certainly that which is altogether without a share in the good would not ever seek the good."

¹⁰⁶ In his work, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996), 239, David Roochnik identifies Socratic self-knowledge with knowledge of the erotic structure of the soul. This seems to me to be correct. I only add that Socrates cannot know the *better and worse* through knowledge of *ta erotica* (Ibid., 243-244), since eros itself does not necessarily know these. It can be deceived about them. Rather, the reflection on eros can lead to a reflection on the nature of the Good once one thinks through rigorously the implications of the fact that each thing that we desire, we also *believe* to be good. Hence, eros points to the ever more

to what we encountered in Aristophanes' myth. For Diotima, however, Hephaestus is not the answer.

What is required now is a firmer grasp of how eros and logos are moved by what is at rest, by the silent inheritance of sleeping Poros and this is the theme which comes to the fore at 206a12, when the definition of eros as the desire for "the good being one's own always (*tou to agathon autôî einai aei*)" introduces immortality as an object of desire alongside beauty and goodness.

From Temporality to Eternity

Man, according to Diotima, desires not only the good or beautiful but their perpetual possession. Indeed, Socrates is warned that there is simply no way to become skilled in erotics without recognizing that the desire for immortality causes all erotic behavior (207c2-3), since only through birth is it possible for the mortal to partake in immortality: "by means of engendering (*genesei*), because it always leaves behind (*kataleipei*) another young one in place of the old...." (207d2-3). The mortal is not capable of being "entirely the same always" as the divine is (208a8) and this is true not only for the body, but even for the soul, since one's character, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains and fears are in constant flux (207e2ff). What is "most strange of all", however, is that this unceasing flux also affects the sciences:

.... not only do some come to be and some pass away for us and we are never the same in respect of the sciences, but each one of the sciences is affected in the

comprehensive nature of its desire for the Good but is not, by itself, a reliable ground for the distinction between better and worse.

same way. For what is called study is done on account of knowledge passing out of us. For the exiting of knowledge is called forgetting, but study, by producing (*empoioussa*) another new memory instead of what has left, saves knowledge so that it appears (*dokein*) to be the same. (207e5-208a6)

Diotima's argument is quite strange since it is unclear why science itself is said to undergo change simply because the "scientist" forgets and remembers, but she might mean something along the following lines: Knowing any science is a process in which thought grasps the epistemic elements and the relations between them one at a time.¹⁰⁷ As far as *dianoia* is concerned, the whole body of knowledge is present only temporally, never all at once. Diotima seems to identify studying with a kind of recollection, not of the intelligible elements themselves, but of memories, or copies, of them which are produced in the soul, such that everything *appears* to be the same. While she does not discuss how the soul grasps the epistemic originals in the first place, the unity of all subsequent discourse is created anew out of temporal copies, temporally woven together and progressively more distant from the original.

It is obvious, however, that genesis, psychic or physical, achieves this kind of immortality only if the "young" which is left behind *is*, in fact, of the same kind as the old and if indeed the science which is being remembered is the same as that which has been forgotten. Genesis, both physical and psychic, depends for whatever coherence it has, not on the process of replication but on the sameness of the kinds which appear

¹⁰⁷ This seems to be at least part of the reason why later, at 211a5 of the ascent passage, the Beautiful itself is said to be *oude tis logos oude tis epistêmê*. As Krüger shows on pgs. 208-210, all discursive sciences, including mathematics, are, qua series or collection of intelligible elements, thought temporally and related inextricably to the temporal.

within the process, and therefore on the enduring unity of properties that makes each kind what it is, a unity which cannot itself be coming into being and passing away.¹⁰⁸

The temporal fate of the soul and the sciences, then, introduces the particular problem of the relation of reflective consciousness to time (208c1ff). Genesis as the constant replication of sameness within the continuum of spatio-temporal difference is conscious neither of sameness nor of itself. Man, however, while simultaneously affected by the same erotic motion of genesis, is distinct by virtue of his ability to consciously think and speak about it.¹⁰⁹ To this degree, he begins to transcend genesis, to think of himself as more than a mere moment within it. Hence, the specifically human phenomena start to come into view when man becomes concerned not with the kind “human being” or with leaving behind another of the same kind, but with the immortality of *me*, this particular human being. Diotima’s account is now at a point which corresponds closely to the emergence of *Selbstbewußtsein* from the knowledge of the life process in Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology*. In both cases, reflection on the flux of life awakens consciousness to the ways in which it is separate from that flux. And just as in Hegel, the concern of the human individual is to preserve himself (or in this case,

¹⁰⁸ For this reason, Bury’s emendation at line 208b4 of *athanaton* to *adunaton* seems to me to be clearly mistaken. Immortal nature is precisely different from mortal nature in that it *does* have another way to be immortal – namely by being always the same as itself. See Krüger on p. 169: “Das eine [d.h. Das Göttliche] ist immer, das andere [Das Sterbliche] ist immer wieder.”

¹⁰⁹ This is made clear by the fact that in the discussion of immortality, man appears twice. First, his body and his soul are discussed as part of the mortal nature he shares with all animals, none of whom, other than man, act with *logismos*, or calculation (207b7). Then, at 208c1 Socrates is told “to look to the love of honor among human beings”, that is, specifically at the human phenomena themselves.

the immortal memory of himself) from the unself-conscious movement of the life-process.

Diotima begins with examples of those who made the final sacrifice for the sake of immortal fame, such as Achilles who died for Patroclus and Codrus who gave his life for the preservation of Athens and his ruling dynasty. But these sacrifices lead directly to the silence of the grave, for it is only by dying that the hero can engender immortal fame. This kind of immortality, therefore, may be the chronological terminus of self-conscious subjectivity but it cannot constitute its *telos*. Perhaps this is the reason why Diotima leaves behind the heroes almost immediately, in favor of those who wish to generate, specifically by means of speech, the things which are suitable for the living soul: "both practical wisdom and all the other virtues"(209a3-4). Note, however: the erotic pursuits of these men, the "pregnant in soul" (209a1), correspond to the first step of the ladder of love at 209e5. In both cases, desire leads to the love of a beautiful body and from there to the search for a beautiful soul, the discovery of which issues at once in the generation of speeches. The generation of *logoi* makes the two youths into one. In more accessible terms, *paideia* is their marriage and virtuous speeches are their children, which they nurture "in common" (*kekoinonêkotes*)(209c2-6).

If this is the case, however, why does Diotima need to begin the ascent again at 209e5? Why does the present description not lead to "the final and complete revelations"? A hint can be found in her mention of Homer and Hesiod, Lycurgus and Solon, who left such "enviable children" behind after them (209d1-e1). There is

something of a disjunction between these examples and the discussion of the young man pregnant with virtue who clings strongly (*panu aspazetai*) to another and generates within him (209b6). With whom did Homer generate and nurture his poetic offspring? Certainly not with his audiences, who are not poetically inspired and who at best could be his passive receptacles and transmitters. Nor could Lycurgus and Solon “generate together” with the Athenian and Spartan people; in an important sense, precisely these are their offspring. Poetic children are the product of inspiration not *dialegesthai*, while legislators found nations by virtue of political prudence. In each case offspring are born from the gifts of individual inspiration and not common generation of *logoi*.

In an important sense, the erotic ascent has reversed itself and we are still speaking of *ekgona kataleipein*, the leaving behind of an offspring like *oneself* (209d2-3) as was the case in animal reproduction.¹¹⁰ But the finitude of human life dictates an economy of scarcity with regard to fame as well; each poet or legislator will be essentially and ineradicably concerned with *his* own deathless fame and not necessarily with the beloved who inspires him to generate his speeches, if there in fact was such a one at all. Clearly, the love of honor transcends the merely physical manifestations of temporal genesis, since the poets are those who educate the Greeks regarding “how it is necessary for a good man to be and what things it is necessary for him to practice” (209c1), but love of honor does not attain the vantage point from which consciousness grasps the full significance of its temporal activity.

¹¹⁰ Cf. 207d4 and 208b2

By making a distinction between “these erotics”, that is, the whole of her account hitherto and the “final and complete revelations” (209e5-210a1), Diotima indicates that the erotic ascent must be taken up anew, but on a higher, if more paradoxical, level, where logos must overcome the temporal concern of individuality with itself. Diotima has confidence that even an erotic dullard like Socrates is capable of understanding the desire for immortality (210a1) (no doubt since it is an elaboration of the universal experience of self-love to the extent that we love not just the immortal as such, but *our* immortality). But understanding the full significance of erotic activity requires transcending it entirely, and Diotima has doubts about whether Socrates can follow what is coming (209e6).

Scala Amoris: Eternity as the Perfection of Temporality

Two specific elements of the final ascent passage will be emphasized here. The first is the role of logos, which, significantly, was hardly mentioned in the discussion of immortality.¹¹¹ Second, is the new requirement of a guide (*ho hegoumenos*) who must lead the young initiate through the erotic journey (210a7). These two must be understood together in order to get at the meaning of the passage as a whole.

We begin with logos. The urge to speak arises from the initiate’s love of a single beautiful body, just as in the earlier ascent.¹¹² Here, however, the generation of *logoi* has

¹¹¹ In the discussion of generation and giving birth in the beautiful, for example, logos appears only once, as *logismos* or the calculation which impels the human animal to fight to the death for its young (207b7).

¹¹² Cf. 210a7 with 209b8.

a further consequence: the transition from love of one body to the love of many bodies (210a6-7). At first glance, the point is a simple one: in speaking to his beloved and extolling his beauty, the lover is pointed toward the conclusion that if it is necessary to pursue the beauty of looks (*diôkein to ep' eidei kalon*), he should not be concerned with one body but with the complete manifestation of beauty. The role of logos here is paradigmatic for what follows: The speeches which the lover speaks to his beloved, which he generates "in" or "with" the beloved, make the *lover* able to perceive (*katanoêsai*) what the nature of his pursuit in fact is. It allows him to "see" the universal implications of a particular activity.¹¹³ This seeing, furthermore, has a direct effect on eros. Realizing the universal nature of beautiful looks causes the eros for one body to "slacken" (210b5).

The next stage is perhaps the most curious in the ascent passage. After the lover has come to understand the absolute superiority of psychic to physical beauty, he must

¹¹³ One must note the link between *katanoêsai* and *nous*, or intellectual vision. The verb *katanoein* itself has a connotation of looking at, viewing or perceiving with the eye of the mind. On logos as the enabler of intellectual vision see David Roochnik, *The Tragedy of Reason: Toward a Platonic Conception of Logos* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 116. Martha Nussbaum has a different assessment of this passage in her very interesting book *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 179. In her reading, the step from one particular body to the universal form of beauty is the result of a "decision" to see quantitatively heterogeneous beautiful individuals as qualitatively homogenous (though contingently separate) instances. That is, it is an act of will and prudential judgment not to love the merely particular, as most people invariably do. The general drift of her argument, of course, is that this "decision" is a flawed one, by removing us from the context of ordinary human relationships, which is the only context in which we can be fully human. The balance of the *Symposium* does not, I believe, support this reading. The movement up the ladder is not a product of volition, but rather of a broadening of understanding. As for Nussbaum's contention that the move up the ladder constitutes an "impoverishment" of our humanity, my interpretation of the rest of the dialogue will have to stand, for now, as an attempt at a considered refutation.

love one soul and there “seek and give birth to such *logoi*” as will make “the young” better, which presumably refers to the young beloved, his *paidikos* (210c1-3). And yet the result of the beloved’s improvement is that the *lover* is compelled to go up to the next step: the beautiful laws, customs and pursuits, the study of which allows him, the lover, to see (*idein*) that each of these forms of beauty is akin to the other (210c4-5).¹¹⁴ The lover then turns to the sciences and again generates “beautiful and magnificent speeches and thoughts (*dianoêmata*)” (210d5) by which he is “strengthened and increased” in preparation for the final vision of the beautiful itself.¹¹⁵ I shall have more to say about this strange transition later in the chapter.

Before continuing, Diotima exhorts Socrates to pay attention (*ton noun prosechein*), thus signaling another break in the ascent just before the summit is reached (210e1). Up to this point, the education of the lover has been a temporal effort of discursive thought – similarities are noticed across different instances, collected, and

¹¹⁴ The Greek reads: “...tiktein logous toioutous kai zêtein, hoitines poiêsousi beltious tous neous, hina anankasthêi au theasasthai to en tois epitedeumasi.....” Benardete takes *au* as emphasizing that the purpose clause beginning with *hina* refers to the lover as opposed to the previous clause, which therefore refers to the beloved. I believe his reading of the passage is the correct one.

¹¹⁵ There is a further subtlety of grammar here which affects the sense of the whole passage. The text at 210c6ff reads: “meta de ta epitêdeumata epi tas epistêmas agagein, hina idêi au epistêmôn kallos....” It is unclear here, whether the subject of the verb *agagein* (to lead) is the lover, who would then be leading the beloved upward, or the guide, who is leading the lover. As Bury (p. 126) notes, the infinitive verb is still complementary with the impersonal *dei* (must) at 210a4 the subject of which is “the one going correctly to this (erotic) affair”; i.e. the lover. And yet he is of the opinion that the subject here is no longer the young lover but the guide. Benardete translates the passage such that the lover is the one leading the young beloved, in order that the *lover* may then look upon the sciences. I believe that Benardete’s translation is correct here. The convoluted nature of the passage fits with the extremely subtle transformation in the love relationship which Diotima is trying to capture. For an interesting discussion of the different senses of *dei* and *chrê*, see Seth Benardete, “XPH and ΔEI in Plato and Others,” *Glotta* 43 (1965): 285-298.

woven into logos, and this is true even when the lover turns to the “vast open sea of the beautiful and engages in “ungrudging philosophy” (hence the mention of giving birth to *dianoemata*). Each level of the ascent is “higher” than its predecessor in two ways: first, by being more encompassing – the insight about beauty at each stage is raised to a more universal level in the subsequent stage - and second by virtue of the greater temporal endurance of the manifestations of beauty at each successive stage of the ascent. Hence we begin from the beauty of body, about which the prophet long ago declared “all flesh is grass”.¹¹⁶ From there we proceed to psychic beauty which can far outlast the bodily, and then on to the beauty of laws which can endure beyond the full term of many human lives. The beauty of the sciences is yet more permanent (but not eternal, since, as we saw, no dianoetic activity can be eternal). Diotima’s education in erotic self-knowledge, then, is both a progress in the comprehension of each stage by that which emerges from it, and the progressive approximation, by means of temporal endurance, of instances to the eternity of their paradigm.

Now, however, after the lover has been educated (*paidagôgêthêi*) up to this point in erotics (210e3), he is prepared for a step which is without equivalent in the previous account of lovers of honor. He “suddenly sees (*katopsetai*) something wondrously beautiful in nature”, the beautiful itself. *Auto to kalon*, however, is without multiplicity, motion or change and therefore also time; accordingly, it cannot be *epistêmê* or logos

¹¹⁶ Isaiah, 40:6-7.

(211a7).¹¹⁷ The principle at work in this passage is that the discursive articulation of difference, relation and change enables us to see unity and sameness which cannot, *per definitione*, be articulated discursively. How does logos, which is itself a multiplicity, make unity visible?

To understand this we must return again to the beginning and consider the guide who accompanies the lover and beloved. At least as far as erotic matters go the necessity of such a guide is hardly obvious. After all, Diotima does not (indeed could not) assert that the guide is needed to bring the two lovers together. One would imagine that the erotic nature of youth suffices to accomplish that on its own.¹¹⁸ In the ascent passage, however, the generation of speeches which initiates the erotic climb only occurs “if the guide is guiding correctly” (210a6). Without the work of the guide, eros does not necessarily ascend the ladder. This is understandable since it is quite obvious that most people fail to pursue the intimations of wholeness within their erotic experience.¹¹⁹ Broadening the vistas opened by eros evidently requires something more. A further condition for anyone to reach the point where he can see the beautiful itself is that he must be guided through erotics not only correctly but *in order* (*ephexês te kai*

¹¹⁷ The description of the idea of the beautiful begins with *aei on* at 211a1, proceeds through negations of any kind of difference, motion or transformation and ends again with describing it as *auto kath'auto, meth'autou monoeides aei on* at 211b1-2. Eternity is the frame or all encompassing structure within which all temporality occurs.

¹¹⁸ As can be seen from the fact that no guide is needed at 209aff in the case of lovers of immortal honor.

¹¹⁹ Cf. 212b4 where Socrates says that one would not easily get a better helpmeet for human nature than eros. Note that he does not exclude the possibility entirely.

orthôs)(210e3). The erotic revelations must, one can assume, be arranged in ascending order of comprehension.

All this forces the question upon us: *Who* is the guide? In one obvious sense he is the philosophical friend and teacher, but this answer points to further questions (204d8); two of them, especially: Why does the philosopher teach? And *how* does he teach? The first question is as difficult to answer as the motivations of philosophical pedagogy are complex. The philosopher may, of course, be motivated by eros; because of his natural desire for philosophical conversation and friendship he cannot help being attracted to and loving the beautiful and well-ordered young souls, the potential philosophers of the coming age.¹²⁰

None of this, however, would suffice to make him a *guide* unless he knew where he was going, which means that he, or someone in the chain of those who have taught him, has already traversed the correct order of all steps in the erotic progress. But would this not mean that at some point there must be a guide who is beyond eros precisely to the extent that he has already been initiated? Otherwise, if the guide were exactly as needy as the young initiate, he himself would need both a guide and a young

¹²⁰ This is not to deny that there can of course be non-philosophical motivations for teaching, such as the desire for immortal fame or enjoyment of the power which knowledge gives the philosopher over the needy young. None of these, however, are relevant to understanding the guide *per se*.

beloved in whom to generate speeches. In this case, at least, the blind most definitely cannot lead the blind.¹²¹

It requires but little effort, then, to realize that if the process is followed backwards it leads either to infinite regress, and the disintegration of erotic *paideia*, or to the necessity that the beautiful itself must ultimately be present as the third – both between the philosopher and the initiate as well as the initiate and his beloved. Only on the condition that such presence is possible *within the temporal process* can the experience of erotic attraction between two individuals be transformed into friendship for the beautiful.¹²²

This perhaps explains the peculiarity of the previously noted transition at 210c3 from the generation of speeches which improve the *beloved* to the *lover's* turning toward the beauty of laws and customs and eventually toward the sciences as a whole. Somehow, the presence of a third allows love and concern for another to be reconciled to self-love in a way which was not possible before, when love and the generation of speeches terminated in the poet's concern for his own immortal fame while the beloved disappeared from view. This broadening of erotic vision requires that the guide be able to make at least the lover see that the object of his desire is *not* the generation of another like himself, or like the beloved, or like some combination of both of them. The initiate

¹²¹ Diotima does not wonder and repeatedly tells Socrates that he should not either. See 205b4 and 207c9(*mê thaumadze*).

¹²² See 211b5: *to kalon archêtai kathoran*. One "begins" to see the beautiful as one ascends, not only at the end.

must be turned away from the human form of beauty altogether and away from the beloved. The essential point is that there is no equivalent in Diotima to the importance, in Hegel, of the satisfaction of individual thymotic assertion, whether through recognition by another or through immortal fame (that is, recognition by many others), for the attainment of self-knowledge. Subjective satisfaction does not suffice as a principle of ascent, not because Diotima denies its existence (which would hardly be possible) but because satisfaction of the temporal, or empirical subject presupposes the presence within subjectivity of the no longer desiring, and hence perfectly "satisfied", divine third. The number Three is the philosophic condition for the reconciliation of duality.

This line of reflection can now be joined to the preceding one on logos. The guide in the final and decisive sense is the order of intelligibility itself which must be present in logos as that toward which all intelligible speech points. One might object that there is no technical discussion of the forms in the *Symposium*, nor any mention of the problem of *koinônia* and *methexis*, and that the realm of intelligibility is restricted here only to the beautiful, but these objections do not meet the main point. The *Symposium* deals with the intelligible cosmos understood *sub specie particularis*, as is fitting for a dialogue which is not the complete Platonic teaching, but one restricted to beauty and love, as agreed between Socrates and Agathon.¹²³ But the whole structure of

¹²³ Rosen, *Symposium*, 199. And cf. Krüger, 216: "Est ist ja auffallend, daß die Ausdrücke, die von dem einzigen Göttlichen gebraucht werden, sonst immer bei Plato zur Charakteristik der vielen

intelligibility is still implicated nonetheless since beauty is an attribute of *ta onta* when these are present to us as objects of love or desire, just as goodness is an attribute of the object of valuation, and truth of the object of epistemic judgment.

Man articulates the intelligibility of experience by means of speech and as such speech necessarily involves both relation and differentiation. Furthermore, speech is necessarily relative and contextual, since what we say differs based on the part of the whole we are discussing and the context in which we discuss it. Finally, since it bespeaks the changing ways in which the elements are combined in experience, logos is necessarily temporal. However, all such characteristics are rejected out of hand when Diotima discusses the beautiful itself, which is "*ho estin*", pure, self-same unity (211c7) of which there cannot be a fully precise and determinate logos.¹²⁴ The goal of *dialegethai* between the lovers, and indeed of dialectic, is not to produce a comprehensive logos of the soul and its capacities, nor is the goal an absolute discourse which captures the full truth of any form, or of the totality of all forms. This is not because the *Symposium* is an insufficiently "technical" dialogue, but because there is no such discourse. The soul, qua erotic, is polymorphous activity which is determined by the visibility of form while form is not produced from within speech but presupposed by it.

Ideen dienen, etwa wenn von dem Gerechten oder dem Gleichen "selbst" und "an sich" die Rede ist."

¹²⁴ *Auto to kalon* is neither coming to be nor passing away, growing nor decaying, beautiful only in one way but ugly in another, or at one time beautiful and at another not, nor beautiful to one and ugly to another, nor in one place beautiful and in another ugly, nor is it *in* anything at all (211a1-5).

Instead logos must achieve, from within its temporal and relational context, a progressive purification, a *katharsis*, which carries it closer to the point at which the soul can see that speech about this or that empirical instance within our experience – say, a beautiful body – is in fact *about* the eternal, determinate nature which is visible *in* that body.¹²⁵ Logos makes its intentional nature progressively clearer to the degree that it is able to point the thinker toward *seeing* the formal unity which has been implicit in the progress he has been making in dialectic. The ideal trajectory of the ascent, then, is not toward logos as the totality of thinkable conceptuality, but logos as the transparent medium *through which* the determinate unity presupposed in any concept suddenly becomes visible to the intellect.¹²⁶ The task of achieving this perfect discursive transparency is an asymptotic one. Diotima herself notes that one who has arrived at the highest point of the ascent through “correct pederasty” (*orthôs paidarestein*) “almost”

¹²⁵ Nussbaum, then, has things backwards when she says (Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 198) that “the pure light of the eternal form either eclipses or is eclipsed by the flickering lightning of the opened and unstably moving body.” It is rather the case that only in the light of the determinate, formal unity of properties which makes it what it is, is any instance, any body, visible at all. No formal unity, no determinate particulars. But then: no determinate particulars, no experience. See Alexander Nehamas, “Plato on the Imperfection of the Sensible World,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975): 105-117.

¹²⁶ Cf. Aryeh Kosman’s previously cited article *Charmides’ First Definition*, p. 208-209. A particularly germane example of this is the discussion of justice in Book IV of the *Republic*, the goal of which is to locate, by means of some sufficient illumination (*phôs...ikanon*) where justice might be in the fully founded city which Socrates has built with Adeimantus and Glaucon (427d1-4). To find the complete form of justice, which applies to the good man as well as the good city, we try to identify justice in the good city, and then “apply what came to light there to a single man....considering them side by side and rubbing them together like sticks we would make justice burst into flame (*eklampsaî tēn dikaiosunēn*), and having come to light, confirm it for ourselves” (434e3-435a3). The “rubbing together” of accounts makes the form visible. Cf. with the famous passage in *Ep. VII* 344b7, where it is not the form which flashes forth, but *ekselampse phronēsis peri hekaston kai nous* – “thought and intelligence shines forth onto each thing.”

(*shedon*) touches the end (*telous*)(211b5-7). At no point, however, does logos as a discursive image of an intelligible original become that original any more than eros becomes the beautiful itself. However, the ascent passage emphasizes that there is only logos, as opposed to rhetoric or babble and there can only be correct pederasty, or reciprocal love, to the extent that intelligible unity can be made present in logos. As the necessity of a guide demonstrates, however, this presence cannot be a product of the activity, motion or “life” of logos just as the guide cannot be simply another initiate.

We can state the decisive difference between Diotima and Hegel as follows: In Hegel, education in self-knowledge is the organic discursive development of the unity of subject and object, the capstone of which is the completed speech of the Absolute Idea. In the case of Diotima, however, the lover is “strengthened” by giving birth to speeches in “ungrudging philosophy” (210d6-7) but his speaking strengthens him for the work of silent vision. This same point can be reached from another direction by noting the difference between the initial encounters which instigate the process of spiritual education in the *Phenomenology* and the *Symposium*: combatants on the one hand and lovers on the other. The encounter of lovers and combatants are both implicitly articulate; man has something to say about both war and love, as Homer can amply attest. The lover and the warrior are also both concerned with immortality – in the form of deathless reputation or perpetual possession and therefore are implicitly comprehensive since the desire for recognition by another implies the desire for recognition by as many as possible, just as love of the beautiful in one body quite

quickly opens our eyes to the possibility of loving beauty in many bodies, to say the least. Thus far both principles are equal. The lover, however, is more inclined to be aware that the beauty of the beloved is a gift which he encounters, rather than the product of his own work. For this reason, the ascent passage deals with love and, as opposed to the dialectic of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, requires a non-discursive break or disjunction. There is no conceptual or discursive path from the parts, or stages, to the whole.

This, however, is *not* the same as the absence of subjectivity in the vision of the beautiful. Although Kierkegaard claims that at the top of the ladder “breathing almost stops in the pure ether of the abstract”, Diotima portrays human life continuing even in the presence of the beautiful (211d2). So long as man is alive he continues to speak and to engender, as is clear from her question to Socrates: “Don’t you consider that there alone, in seeing the beautiful in the way it is seeable, he generates not images of virtue (*eidôla arêtes*), because he does not lay hold of an image, but true (*alêthê*), because he lays hold of the truth” (212a3-6).¹²⁷ In the presence of the beautiful one does not cease to generate, one simply generates *true* images of truths. I leave aside all other technical considerations to note only that, *pace* Kierkegaard, if there is generation at the top of the ladder there must no doubt be quite a bit of breathing as well.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Man also continues to opine, q.v. 211d4.

¹²⁸ Cf. *R*, 493a-b.

What, however, does Diotima mean by the generation, specifically, of images? *Eidôla* can of course refer to speeches, which would continue the theme of generation of *logoi* which has run like a thread throughout the ascent passages. Or perhaps, human life itself is a moving *eidôlos* of virtue in the same way that time, in the *Timaeus*, is a moving likeness of eternity (*eikô kinêton....aiônos*).¹²⁹ And indeed, Diotima seems to intimate that distinctly human life is only possible in the exercise of the noetic capacity which is here described as the beholding of the beautiful with the instrument with which one must (212a1-2). Only in this case is there a life worth living for a human being (*biôton anthropoi*)(211d2). There is, then, no disappearance of subjective interest in the vision of the intelligible, if this vision is understood as a moment *within* the comprehensive effort of the subject to understand his true interests, which is simply to say, the effort of the human being to live intelligently.¹³⁰ In the terms of Diotima's earlier myth, this is how Poros, although asleep, moves Penia and this is why her courage, eagerness plotting, and devices are *kata ton patera*. Without the father as the unmoved goal to which these activities are being directed, they would be no more understandable or rational than are random, spasmodic convulsions. The "abandonment" of subjectivity, then, should be seen as a necessary step in its perfection. The case of Alcibiades, who will occupy us in the coda to this chapter, provides a particularly vivid example of the consequences of failing to understand this.

¹²⁹ *Ti.* 37d5ff.

¹³⁰ See Krüger, 186: "Denn der Aufstieg zum Ewigen hat den Sinn, *wahre Zeitlichkeit* zu ermöglichen." [emphasis mine]

Alcibiades

Shortly after Alcibiades makes his grand entrance and discovers Socrates at the drinking party, an interesting exchange occurs between the two.¹³¹ Socrates calls for Agathon's help in defending himself from "the love of this man" (213c6), who in his jealousy is capable of "wondrous deeds" (213d3): "So see that he doesn't try something now, and reconcile between us (*diallaxon hêmas*), or if he should try to use force, protect me, for I really quake with fear at the madness of this man and his love of lovers (*philerastian*)(213d4-6).¹³² To this Alcibiades responds directly, by taking up the theme of reconciliation: "No reconciliation (*diallagê*) is possible between me and you".

The word for reconciliation here is related to the verb *diallassein*, which can also mean to exchange goods with one another. And indeed, its usage in this context does make a certain rough-and-ready empirical sense.¹³³ All lovers are attracted to one another with some object in view, which they hope to achieve in, with or through the other. Socrates never mentions what it was that he wanted from Alcibiades. Under the influence of wine (which, as he says, is truthful (217e4)) Alcibiades, however, does

¹³¹ In his interesting little study of the dramatic action of the *Symposium*, Roger Hornsby notes that between the time when the flute girl leaves and Alcibiades enters, no verbs of motion are used: "It is as though the earlier portion of the party had achieved a condition similar to that of the Idea of Beauty." This repose, Hornsby goes on to argue, is then destroyed by the entry of Alcibiades. Roger Hornsby, "Significant Action in the *Symposium*" in *The Classical Journal*, vol. 52, no. 1 (Oct. 1956): 39-40. And cf. Krüger, 284. I would only add that according to Diotima the perfect repose of Beauty Itself can never be achieved by the lover – hence the references to the generation of speeches. Genesis is motion and so is thinking.

¹³² *Panu orrôdô* is the Greek which is rendered by "really quake with fear". It is, as Bury notes on p. 138, an exceptionally strong word.

¹³³ Cf. 218e4, Euripides, *Alcestis*, 14 and also see the *Republic* 371d1-3.

reveal at least something of what *he* had wanted from Socrates and why he feels cheated. This buyer's remorse sheds light on the difference between philosophical and tyrannical understandings of the capacity of speech and prepares our transition to the *Republic*.

As in the case of Critias, it will not do to simply disassociate Alcibiades from Socrates by stigmatizing him as fundamentally un-philosophical or corrupt, as the rotten apple. Alcibiades made the study of Socrates a profession, even an obsession. He denies that any of the others truly knows Socrates, whereas he will make "it" (Socrates' character) clear (216d1) because he once saw (*eidon*) the divine statues which are inside him (*ta entos agalmata*)(216e6).¹³⁴

Indeed, Alcibiades surpasses all other speakers in his emphasis on interiority and reflection, on going within and looking within himself, Socrates and the Socratic *logoi*.¹³⁵ He turns his attention and that of his listeners to his own self-awareness, he twice mentions that he is "conscious" or "aware" (*sunoida emautôi*) that he was unable to resist the effect of Socrates' speeches and that he could not contradict him but must do whatever he says. The same locution is also used by Socrates in the *Apology*, but there it refers to his awareness that he knows nothing, which is the origin of his philosophical

¹³⁴ The same phrase (*ta entos*) is used when Socrates describes being inflamed upon seeing what was "within" Charmides' cloak (*Chrm.* 155d3) and indeed the erotic undercurrent of the words is unmistakable in both cases, but the reactions of each to the erotic revelation are instructively different. Socrates tells his auditor that after the disorienting vision of Charmides' bodily form, he was able to right himself, by reflecting on the wisdom of the poet Cydias, and continue with his investigation of Charmides' soul. Alcibiades is so thunderstruck by the "divine and golden images" within that, he says, "it was necessary to do whatever Socrates ordered" (217a1-2).

¹³⁵ Cf. 222a2, (*entos autôn gignomenos*), 215b3 (*endothen agalmata echontes theôn*), 216d6 (*endothen posês sôphrosunês*).

quest.¹³⁶ In the case of Alcibiades, this same interiority has more ambiguous fruits.¹³⁷ Alcibiades, like the fellow symposiasts, has been bitten by the viper of philosophical speeches (*tôn en philosophiai logôn*) and at least claims that he too has tasted of philosophic madness (218a5ff), but for him this consistently leads not to the problem of philosophy, but rather to the problem of *Socrates* the individual as he is related to Alcibiades the individual.¹³⁸ For Alcibiades, the problem is always that he “does not know what to do with this human being” (216c3).

Immediately after refusing reconciliation with his teacher and lover, Alcibiades gives another indispensable hint of what lies at the root of his Socratic obsession: “Now Agathon, spare me some of the fillets so that I may crown this amazing head of his, and he will not reproach me for crowning you, for he conquers all human beings in speeches, not only yesterday as you did, but always.....” (213e1-4). Speech as a conqueror has an overpowering fascination for Alcibiades. He marvels that Socrates charms human beings just like Marsyas the flute-playing satyr, only he is yet more amazing (215b8) because while Marsyas has instruments at his disposal, Socrates manages the same effects with “bare words” (*psilois logois*) (215c7). Furthermore, these words affect everyone, man woman and child (215d5). Socrates is master not only of the *kaloi kagathoi* or the

¹³⁶ 216a3 and 216b3. *Ap.* 21b4-5.

¹³⁷ q.v. Krüger, at 288: “Alcibiades ist nicht ‘uneingeweiht’, aber auch nicht eingeweiht.”

¹³⁸ The theme of individuality and its relationship to tyranny is hinted at almost immediately when Alcibiades sits down and elects himself as symposiarch, no doubt to the astonishment of the other guests: “So then, as symposiarch (*archonta.....tes poseôs*), until all of you have drunk enough, I choose – myself (*emauton*)” (213e9-10). Bury (139) remarks on the noteworthy emphatic usage of *emauton*.

phronimoi but also of the many, the whole crowd. This is perhaps inevitable, since in Alcibiades' descriptions, the Socratic *logoi* strike with the greatest force on the emotions, which are shared by all without regard to intellectual perfection. Indeed, Alcibiades' assessment of speakers such as Pericles is that, while they speak well, one is simply not affected (*epaschon*) in the same way— one's soul is not in an uproar (*oud' etethorubêto mou hê psuchê*)(215e4-6). Socrates' speeches, on the other hand, make the tears flow and the heart jump in a Corybantic dance (though, for all that, it bears remarking Alcibiades was apparently in sufficient possession of his wits to notice "that very many others (*pampollous*) are affected in the same way" (215e1-4), and this no doubt opened his eyes to a whole new range of possibilities). Like Charmides' beauty, Socratic speech annihilates differences. It is perhaps even more powerful than beauty or charisma because it does not even require the presence of Socrates to work its magic; it retains its power even if the speaker of his words is a poor orator (215d4).

Certainly, all of this cannot be dismissed as a figment of Alcibiades' overheated imagination. His descriptions accord with countless other occasions in the dialogues which portray Socrates' ability to flummox his listeners. And yet, there is at least something in Alcibiades' reaction to Socrates of the revival meeting convert who has come down with a case of the old-time religion.¹³⁹ This impression is strengthened when one notes the degree to which he concentrates on the practical, or moral, nature of

¹³⁹ A fact noted by Benardete in his commentary on the dialogue. See *Plato's Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 198.

Socratic speech and practice. To hear Socrates is to become practically enslaved to him (215e7), to learn for the first time that one is capable of being ashamed (216b1-2).¹⁴⁰ Upon hearing him one has no choice but simply to *do* whatever he says.¹⁴¹ This emphasis continues in Alcibiades' descriptions of what is "worth hearing" of Socrates' exploits in the army (220c3). He can marvel at Socrates' *sôphrosunê*, his courage (*andreian*), his prudence (*phronesin*) and his continence (*karterian*)(219d3) and he emphasizes Socrates' power over the elements (the "truly terrible winters" of Potidaea), his lack of need for food, his power over drink, his ability to continue without sleep. And yet, he is unable to describe anything of Socrates' peculiarly theoretical interests, his love of knowledge or wisdom. Alcibiades somehow sees that only Socrates' speeches have "*nous*" in them, and that they relate to the whole which is fitting to investigate for one who will become beautiful and good (222a2ff), but this whole is not quite the whole of philosophy. The word *sophia* never appears in Alcibiades' speech. Even when he recounts how Socrates once stood stock still, deep in reflection, the entire day and night, this affects him in a way quite close to the simple Ionian soldiers who watch Socrates in bemused amazement. Like them, he too is primarily transfixed by Socrates' extraordinary powers of *physical* endurance (220c3ff).

The absence of a distinctly theoretical element in Alcibiades' Socrates brings us close to the heart of the matter. On the one hand, it is not hard to explain the mutual

¹⁴⁰ The theme of slavery appears again at 219e3-4.

¹⁴¹ Alcibiades mentions this twice in his speech at 216b4 and 217a2.

attraction of these two men. Alcibiades is obviously a connoisseur of hybris on the grand scale, and he can see that Socrates is hybriatic.¹⁴² Furthermore, as evidenced by *Alcibiades I*, Socrates himself was attracted to Alcibiades because of the latter's own titanic, world-embracing eros. He knows very well that Alcibiades exceeds all his lovers in great thoughts (*megalophronusê*) and that he claims to need nothing from anyone.¹⁴³ Precisely such a person, whose possessions, both in terms of body and soul, are already more than sufficient and hence cannot be objects of desire for him, might be open to eros of a more philosophical nature, provided he can be convinced that what he really wants is unattainable without the help of Socrates.¹⁴⁴

Alcibiades was indeed a youth "not ill-favored by nature" (218a6), in Benardete's felicitous translation, and he is capable of seeing that he is very much in need (*pollou endeês*) (216a5), but the concept of need (*endeia*) is not quite comprehended by the statement that need is for an object which one does not now possess. Rather, that of which one is in need is something which one lacks in order to become complete according to a certain understanding of completeness.¹⁴⁵ The question is, of course, what constitutes completeness and hence what object is needed to accomplish it. Alcibiades'

¹⁴² Socrates does not deny this when confronted with it (215b7).

¹⁴³ "oudenos....anthrôpôn endeês einai eis ouden." *Alc. I*, 103b4-104a2.

¹⁴⁴ *Alc. I*, 105d2-5.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Ly.* 221e2ff. In this section of the *Lysis*, Socrates gets Menexenus and Lysis to agree that need is for that of which one has been deprived (*hou an ti apairêtai*) and furthermore that it is for that which is our own (*oikeiou*). Critias was not far off, then, in the *Charmides*, nor was Aristophanes in his speech. We are indeed searching for our own-most wholeness. For a very interesting treatment of *endeia* see L.A. Kosman, "Platonic Love", in *Facets of Plato's Philosophy*, ed. W.H. Wermeister (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum-Assen, 1976), 53-69.

problem is not that he cannot be made to feel needy, but rather that he cannot be made to agree that what he needs specifically is wisdom. While he knows that he is neglecting himself to meddle in the affairs of Athens, he nevertheless flees from Socrates “in order that I do not grow old, sitting around idly next to him” (216a8).¹⁴⁶ Alcibiades has, in other words, no theoretical impetus which can be directed up the ladder, he cannot conceive of himself being completed by *theoria*. Spending a life in philosophical dialogue would be glory for Socrates but idleness for Alcibiades, a fate to be fled from as one flees from the Sirens. Alcibiades and Socrates share certain aspects of their nature, which allows each to magnetize the other, but the relationship never stabilizes because the two cannot share a conception of happiness. There is no mediating third between them, no guide who can show Alcibiades how to reconcile his selfishness with the selflessness of philosophic quest.

It is instructive, in this regard, to compare for a moment Diotima’s ascent with Alcibiades’ pursuit of Socrates. The ascent passage contains six steps, the same number as does Alcibiades’ pursuit.¹⁴⁷ In Diotima, the lover (i) begins with one body and moves from there to (ii) many bodies by means of logos; from many bodies he proceeds to (iii) the soul which is more worthy of honor (*timiôteron*) than the body and from the soul, by means of logos, to (iv) customs, practices or laws, from there to (v) the sciences, or the

¹⁴⁶ “Sitting around idly” renders the Greek *kathêmenos*, which carries a connotation of idleness and living an obscure life, surely a fate unappealing to an Alcibiades. Cf. *Il.*, 24.403 and Pindar, *Olympian Odes* I, 83.

¹⁴⁷ My attention was first drawn to this fact by Leo Strauss, *On Plato’s Symposium*, ed. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 271.

“broad sea of philosophy” in which one gives birth to many beautiful logoi, and finally (vi) to the beautiful *kath’auto*. Alcibiades begins his pursuit (i) by sending away the chaperones so that he and Socrates could be alone with one another, in the expectation that *Socrates* would speak to him as lover to beloved (*erastês paidikois*) (217b5), this is followed by (ii) stripping and wrestling in the nude. The third step (iii) is to invite Socrates to dinner, exactly as a lover plots against a beloved (*erastês paidikois epibouleuôn*) (217c8), the result of which, however, is inconclusive since Socrates makes for the exit as soon as the meal is over. Next (iv) Socrates is invited to dinner and a sleepover, but here too there is no profit to be had. Socrates does nothing; he must be, nudged, or set in motion (*kinêsas*) by Alcibiades and this leads to the fifth step (v) which is Alcibiades’ speech declaring his intentions to Socrates. In the sixth and final step however, speech leads to no revelation of mysteries. Alcibiades sleeps next to Socrates under the same blanket the whole night and nothing happens.

Alcibiades’ unsuccessful pursuit of Socrates is a kind of reverse image of Diotima’s ascent. In both cases, the third step is crucial. For the lover in the ascent passage, the third step turns his attention away from the body to the soul and the next three stages follow from this step as ever more comprehensive articulations of the insight that beauty of the soul is altogether superior to that of the body. In the case of Alcibiades, however, the third step is the moment at which the relationship between the two is reversed. Alcibiades had begun as the beloved expecting to be wooed by Socrates

and instead he now finds himself plotting “like a lover” against Socrates.¹⁴⁸ The unexpected transformation from beloved to lover is the nerve of his complaint (*mempsis*): Socrates so arranges things that those who fancy themselves his beloveds, or masters, discover that they are, in fact, his lovers or slaves (222b2ff). With this *caveat emptor* Alcibiades closes his speech.

The lover and beloved in Diotima’s ascent are ultimately shown that their completeness is found not in one another but rather in the ground of that which they first glimpsed in one another, which is in fact neither of them qua individual. The beautiful itself is completely *koinos*, common or shared, though the desire for it is particular and private. This allows, finally, for the lover’s speeches to be concerned with the betterment of the beloved *and*, at one and the same time, to be for the sake of his own ascent up the ladder. The case of Alcibiades and Socrates, on the other hand, presents the spectacle of an erotic ascent which fails to gain altitude. The absence of a mediating third between them means that the love affair must eventually disintegrate into a master-slave dialectic where no *Aufhebung* is possible, only a vacillation back and forth between the two “moments” – lover and beloved. Their love affair is a war without end because it is not for the sake of any conceivable peace.¹⁴⁹ For Alcibiades, eros in the

¹⁴⁸ He does so in order to find out the answer to a classically Socratic “What is it” question: *ti esti to pragma*: “What is the matter?” (217c6). The “matter” which Alcibiades wants to find out, however, is personal, not philosophical; he wants to know how things stand with Socrates as regards *him*. Cf. Nussbaum, 190: “Alcibiades sees his sexual aim...as a kind of epistemic aim, the aim to achieve a more complete understanding of this particular, complex portion of the world.”

¹⁴⁹ *Nic. Ethics* 1177b5-6.

highest and most complete sense is not the desire to be completed, but the desire for desire, that is, the desire to be the object of the desire of another, and specifically, of the many others whose recognition Alcibiades cannot resist (including, but not limited to, Socrates).¹⁵⁰ He has, he admits, been “bested, or conquered, by the honor of the many” (261b5) and he believes that Socratic rhetoric is the power for igniting desire in people, on the widest conceivable scale. This is how he evidently understood Socrates’ statement in *Alcibiades I* that “no one else is capable of bestowing the power you desire apart from me”. Only Socrates could make it possible for Alcibiades to fill the “whole of mankind with his name”.¹⁵¹ He is attracted to Socrates because he imagines him to be the true master of the *demos*, the one who can turn all men into his lovers.

We are now, I think, in a position to better understand the philosophical significance of Socrates’ statement that he fears Alcibiades’ love of lovers (213d6) and its connection to the theme of discursivity in the *Symposium*. Alcibiades’ understanding of logos as a universal power is a partial assimilation, but therefore also a corruption, of Diotima’s early teaching about eros as a *sundesmos* or bond, which unites the whole through *dialektos*. Alcibiades can be said to accept Diotima’s assertion that erotic logos binds the whole together while ignoring her later, radical modification of that teaching. The erotic nature of *psuchê* binds the whole together in speech not by means of speech

¹⁵⁰ He is motivated by the lethal cocktail that Gorgias attributes to those affected by the beauty of Helen, “*kai hêkon hapantes hup’ erôtos te philonikou, philotimias te anikêtou* – “and they all came moved by desire that wished to conquer and a love of honour which was unconquered.” Gorg. *Hel.*, 4.

¹⁵¹ *Alc.* 105e and 105c3-4. As in the *Charmides*, the tyrant wishes to be the object of all eyes.

alone, but only by means of the ability of speech to render itself at least partly transparent to *ta onta*. Alcibiades, however, mistakes logos rather than the beholding (*theômenou*) (212a1-2) as the peak of Socratic practice and this leads directly to his reversal of the order of priority between theory and praxis in Socrates' life. He concentrates so much on the practical effects of Socrates' discursive magic precisely because he does not see that practice and discourse is in the service of *theoria*. He sees quite clearly that Socrates wears a mask (216d4) of being erotically disposed toward all the beauties and claiming to know nothing, while on the inside he hubristically "believes (*hêgetai*) that....we [i.e. human beings] are nothing" (216e3-4), but he cannot see his way clear to the true ground for this hubris. For him the concern with beauty is only a mask; he cannot conceive of how it can point to something higher. Interestingly, he also identifies Socrates' eros and his claim to ignorance as part of his outer mask, that is, as exoteric, while on the inside he is "full of *sôphrosunê*" (216d7). The possibility of a philosophic moderation which is at the same time radically erotic is not visible to him. To echo the conclusion of a previous chapter, the failure of Alcibiades' pursuit, and of his *sunousia* with Socrates, is "logical" rather than romantic or political.

Indeed, it is impossible to miss the echoes, in Alcibiades, of a conception of logos with which Plato was clearly familiar, namely that of Gorgias. The crux of Gorgias' teaching is found in two related assessments of logos which are part of his exoneration of Helen in the *Encomium of Helen*. First, is his famous remark that logos is a mighty ruler (*logos dunastês megas estin*), who accomplishes the most divine achievements

(*theoitata erga*).¹⁵² Second, is his association of logos *exclusively* with opinion and the passions (without which the nature of the *Encomium* as an amusement (*paigion*) (*Hel*, 21) which is nevertheless absolutely serious, is utterly incomprehensible). Logos “rules” by virtue of the overwhelming effect it has on the passions: it can induce pleasure by means of enchantment (*ethelxe*) and magic (*goêteiai*)(*Hel*, 10); it causes fear and trembling, tearful pity and mournful yearning (*Hel*, 9). Though its form may differ from that of Necessity, its power is substantially identical (*Hel*, 12). However, this irresistible power depends on the fact that the soul has no access to the true nature of things either by means of logos or by means of intellectual intuition. Logos, in other words, owes its power to the ubiquity of error, ignorance and forgetfulness, to the *absence*, rather than the presence, of truth (*Hel*, 11). The soul makes absolutely no contact with *ta onta*, because *ta onta* are neither thinkable nor do they have logos (as is asserted in the fragment of Gorgias’ speech “On Non-Being”).¹⁵³ As a necessary consequence, with regard to most matters, most people make opinion (*doxa*) the guide (*sumboulon*) of the soul (*Hel*, 11), there being no other conceivable alternative. Where Plato in the *Republic* speaks of the eye of the soul, the *omma tês psuchês*, Gorgias significantly speaks only of the “eyes of opinion” (*tois tês doxês ommasin*)(*Hel*, 13) and of the power of logos

¹⁵² Gorg. *Hel*, 8. All further references to this text shall appear parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵³ This fragment is preserved in Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicus*. See esp. paragraph 79 (*hôte ou ta phronoumena estin onta*) and 84-85 (*ouk ara ta onta mênuomen tois pelas alla logon, hos heteros esti tôn hupokeimenôn*). As a consequence, logos cannot bespeak the things nor make available to us their nature (*ouk ara eindeiknutai ta polla tôn hupokeimenôn ho logos*).

only as the substitution of *doxan anti doxês* (*Hel*, 13).¹⁵⁴ Where logos is divorced from *nous* and subordinated to *doxa* it may be a mighty ruler indeed, but only in the same sense that Sancho Panza was governor of Barataria.

Gorgias helps us to see that Plato's portrayal of Alcibiades has significance far beyond any posthumous exoneration of Socrates from responsibility for the Sicilian catastrophe or the other excesses of his compatriots. Alcibiades is a kind of philosophical parody of the desire for universality which is an ineradicable element of human nature. The parody is precisely philosophical because it shows the break between Alcibiades and Socrates, as well as Alcibiades' later infamies, as *necessary* consequences, not of Socratic praxis, but of a certain understanding of the hierarchy of elements within that praxis. As we have already seen, the impulse to comprehensiveness is *both* philosophic and tyrannical since both philosophy and tyranny express themselves in deed and in speech as the desire for the whole. But the *Symposium* seems to argue that absent the uniquely philosophical balance between discursive self-consciousness and "selfless" (because not self-referential) intellectual intuition, *all* speech would necessarily become, not an image of the whole, but an image of human desires, that is, an image of a part. *Dialegethai* would then degenerate from souls attempting to convince one another by means of *logoi* into the exchange of images, in a manner quite similar to Gorgias' description of persuasion as the replacement of opinions by other opinions. Once we are

¹⁵⁴ The only point at which Gorgias makes a connection between logos and *nous* is most telling: "Persuasion expels *nous*" (*to gar tês peithous exên ho de nous*) (*Hel*, 12). Cf. with *Ad.Math*, 87.

trafficking exclusively in images which provide no access to the guiding light of the original, however, it is no longer possible to speak coherently of *eudaimonia*, or the completion of human nature in knowledge of the truth. We are left only with the satisfaction which comes from the knowledge that one's own image is accepted by others, and still more broadly, that it, as opposed to someone else's, "fills the whole of mankind". Seen in this light, Alcibiades' decision to flee from Socrates lest he "grow old alongside him" begins to make a kind of ruthless sense. Stated differently, Socrates' *sunousia* with Alcibiades shows that absent intuitive receptivity to "merely given" intelligible structure, the subject's desire for the absolute reverses itself into a desire to absolutize the subject. Alcibiades illuminates the connection between this impulse for absolute subjectivity and the project of absolute discourse.¹⁵⁵

The *Symposium*, however cannot suffice as a basis for a full articulation of Plato's critique of such a project since, as I have tried to show, it is a serious error to identify Platonic philosophy with eros simply, or even with logos understood as discursive or conceptual understanding. The insights which the *Symposium* offers must be supplemented, for which purpose we turn to study the *Republic*.

¹⁵⁵ Therefore, in a sense no doubt very different from what Martha Nussbaum intends, I agree with her statement (Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 168) that "the dialogue, as a whole, is the speech of Alcibiades rather than of Socrates."

CHAPTER 4

REPUBLIC: *Activity and Receptivity in Platonic Noêsis*

In the *Charmides* and the *Symposium*, neither thumotic self-assertion nor erotic speech “know themselves” since, while each presupposes the intelligibility of its objects, in neither case is the object deduced from or constituted by their activity. It is, rather, presupposed by it. Desire, for example, comes to “know” itself as desire for the good or beautiful only by virtue of the presence of goodness or beauty which is itself without desire, or divine. The soul’s reflexive knowledge is thus mediated by passing through knowledge of its other just as self-consciousness is constituted by the duality of self (or subject) and other (or object). However, unlike in Hegel, this does not lead to the unity of subjectivity and substance because knowledge of the object, for Plato, is *not* the same as Spirit “finding itself in the other”. The reasons for this ultimately derive from the fact that *noêsis* is neither an active nor constructive power. It cannot serve as the same role as self-consciousness in Hegel. A study of the images in the *Republic* will elaborate the full consequences of this difference.

The central importance of the question of intuition explains the focus of this chapter on the Sun and Line images. By this, I do not mean to ignore Socrates’ injunction to think the Cave together with the other two images (517b1). The Cave will receive top billing in the conclusion. Nevertheless, Socrates himself makes a distinction among the three images, since the Cave allegory is supposed to be an image of “our nature” in its education and lack of education (514a1-2), that is, of human life as a whole,

while the first two images, by contrast, are each in their own way restricted.¹ They serve to isolate a certain element of human nature which must be seen in its distinctiveness before it can be incorporated back into *hêmeteran phusin*, "our nature". That element, which was not explicitly a theme in the *Charmides* or the *Symposium*, is the relationship of the soul to the Good. The three images understood together will serve to cast light back upon *eros*, *thumos* and *logos* and thus unite our entire account.²

The character of Glaucon as a Context for the three Images

The emergence of the Good as a thematic concern in the *Republic* does not occur quite where one might have expected it. The Good should have become a theme after Socrates asserts his stupendous claim about the necessity of philosopher-kings at 473c11ff. He then proceeds to lead Glaucon through a "somewhat long argument" distinguishing philosophers from non-philosophers and philosophical knowledge of *to on*, or what *is*, from mere opinion, but he does so without any mention of the necessity of

¹ All Stephanus references in this chapter are from the *Republic*, except where noted otherwise. The division between Book VI of the *Republic*, which contains the Sun and Line images, and Book VII, which begins with the Cave is, so far as we know, a much later editorial decision. If so, it is an excellently philosophical one.

² My interpretation does not pretend to be a comprehensive account of the riches of these three images, which are themselves synoptic portraits of the philosophical life accommodated to the intelligence of a young man who is, at best, a potential philosophical neophyte. The images are incredibly dense and ambiguous and they contain, moreover, several passages which are simply too enigmatic to ever admit of a definitively convincing interpretation. Indeed, this enigmatic nature is itself part of what Plato wishes to teach us about the philosophical possibilities and limitations inherent in the soul's capacity for *logos*, both about itself and about the whole. My purposes here are, accordingly, limited. I wish to follow only one of the threads within the fabric; the same one, in fact, which has led us through the *Charmides* and the *Symposium*.

knowing the idea of the Good (476a5-477b11). And yet, in the image, “being known” (*to gignôskesthai*) is present in “the things known” as a consequence of the Good (509b6-7).

Instead, the Good is introduced as part of a *practical* discussion carried on with Adeimantus and not with Glaucon. In this discussion, the goal is to discover a way for the city to “take philosophy in hand without being destroyed” and also without corrupting the philosophers themselves (497d9). Adeimantus is eventually convinced that, given a certain kind of precisely structured philosophical education, “the many”, finally having had the opportunity to see what a true philosopher is, will become gentle and willingly acquiesce in being ruled by him, or in Socrates’ phrase, by the “painter of regimes” (*politeiôn zôgraphos*)(501c6).

At once, however, a new problem emerges which seems far less amenable to pedagogical therapy. These same philosophical natures are an exceedingly rare find because: “the parts of the nature (*phusin*) which we described as necessarily belonging to them are rarely willing to grow together (*sumphuesthai*) in the same place; rather its many parts grow asunder (*diespasmenê phuetai*)” (503b7-10).³ The good learners, the sharp and quick natures, full of youthfulness and magnificence do not often come together with order, quiet and steadfastness; while conversely, precisely the steady natures prove dull and incapable of learning. Quite remarkably, then, the most perfect

³ Bloom translates this as “grow forcibly asunder”, but the sense of verb in Greek is of parts whose nature is to scatter or disperse. As Adam notes, the parts are not “torn asunder, it is *phusis* itself which is *in partes disiuncta*.” James Adam, ed., *The Republic of Plato*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 46.

human nature is made from naturally disparate parts. It must become a harmonious unity in order to partake of the greatest studies (503e4). The Good now emerges in the context of the problem of unity and order in the soul. The two different parts of the philosophical nature are each “good” in their own way, just as each of Plato’s brothers has his specific virtues. But this means that goodness is simultaneously the principle of the unity of the parts – as that which both have in common – and also the principle of their distinctness and separation, since each is “good” in a different, and incompatible, way. Explaining how this is the case, however, leads the conversation away from the practico-political context in which philosophy has been discussed hitherto and therefore away from Adeimantus and toward Glaucon.

It would, of course, be false to assert that the discussion of the Good, and the images in which it is presented, are intended only for Glaucon. Adeimantus is present as well, as are Thrasymachus and the others. In some sense, the images must be crafted so as to take them all into account. That aside, however, Glaucon is clearly the center of Socrates’ attention. It is he who forces Socrates to continue the discussion of the Good, just as the latter tries to beat an elegant retreat on the grounds that it is not just to speak about things one does not know (506c2-3).⁴ His centrality is dramatically emphasized by his enthralled reaction to the images (508c1) and his pleading with Socrates not to withhold even the slightest detail (509c8). Adeimantus, by way of contrast, maintains a stony silence throughout. It is reasonable, then, to assume that there is something about

⁴ Cf. 427d8.

Glaucón's particular character which makes him more suited to these particular images (and also, perhaps, more in need of them) than his brother.

As is well known, this is hardly the first time in the dialogue that Glaucon drives the argument forward and deepens it. His behavior is of a piece with the rest of the *Republic*.⁵ Glaucon is, after all, "most courageous concerning everything" (357a3), an *anêr erôtikos* of powerful, even comprehensive desires (474d4), a lover of honor, ruling, victory and luxury.⁶ In all these respects, then, he bears important similarities to Critias and to Alcibiades.⁷ And yet, neither Critias nor Alcibiades is ever vouchsafed images of the philosophical life which compare in their rich suggestiveness to what Glaucon will now hear. What is the reason for this?

A hint may be found by paying close attention to a brief passage in Book VIII. There, after having discussed how the perfect city disintegrates into timocracy as a result of the confusion of the "marriage number", Socrates asks which human soul would most correspond to the timocratic regime. Adeimantus answers:

I suppose, said Adeimantus, that he would be somewhat like Glaucon here, as far as love of victory (*philonikias*) is concerned.
Perhaps in this, I said. But to me in these other things he [the timocrat] does not seem to be of the same nature.

⁵ Cf. 357aff, 372c1, 427d8, and 471c2.

⁶ Perhaps the most penetrating recent study of Glaucon's character and its role in the dialogue is in Leon H. Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). See especially pp. 113-114. Adam discusses Glaucon's character in an interesting section of his introduction. See Adam, Introduction §2.

⁷ Like Critias and Alcibiades, Glaucon's character too, necessarily has its political implications, as vividly recorded by Xenophon in *Memorabilia*, III, vi. Socrates sees clearly that what attracts Glaucon to political life is the possibility that he will obtain for himself whatever he should desire (*hotou an epithumês*).

Which ones?

He must be more stubborn, I said, and somewhat less musical though he loves music, and a lover of hearing, though he is no rhetorician. And to slaves such a one as this would be savage, not simply despising slaves, as the adequately educated would. But he would be tame with the freeborn and most obedient to rulers, a lover of ruling and a lover of honor, not being worthy of rule because of speaking ability or anything of the sort, but because of warlike deeds and all things connected with war, being a lover of gymnastic and the hunt. (548d8-549a7)⁸

While Glaucon's nature is obviously deeply colored by timocratic qualities, there is an easily missed shade of his character which Socrates emphasizes by making a distinction between love of victory and love of honor.⁹ Let us approach the difference by designating those traits which represent the inverted correlates of the timocratic ones Socrates says Glaucon does *not* possess. Unlike the timocrat, Glaucon must be musical (which we already know he is from Book III (398c7ff)) and have powerful rhetorical ability (a fact amply evidenced by his remarkable Gyges tale). The crucial character trait in the passage appears to be the central one, however. Unlike the timocrat Socrates describes, Glaucon would not be vicious to slaves and a lickspittle to the high-born.

Now, why exactly would the timocrat need to be cruel or, for that matter, pay any heed at all to those in the social order who are incapable of defending themselves and who, in any event, cannot possibly pose a threat to his own status? The answer lies in his "tameness" toward those above him. The timocrat is intensely concerned with

⁸ Adam notes the resemblance between these traits and characteristics usually attributed to the Spartans, especially love of music and love of hearing. See Adam, *Republic*, 215.

⁹ See Craig, *War Lover*, 110-114.

recognition from others, especially from his superiors.¹⁰ He has a finely developed nose for distinctions of rank and in order to be secure in his own station even as he aspires to a higher one, he needs someone else beneath his boot. The slave, the *persona non grata* in the most final sense, who can hope neither for honor nor recognition, reminds the timocrat not only of how high he has risen, but also of how far it is possible to fall and this is, to say the least, an unwelcome reminder of the extent to which his *philotimia* makes him dependent on others.¹¹ This is timocrat's peculiar un-freedom; he is chained, rather than liberated, by the need for social recognition, by the fact that his *philonikia* is restricted only to those contests which involve personal victory over others.

Glaucon exhibits all aspects of the "thumoeidetic" nature: the love of victory, rule, honor and even luxury (581a9-10), but in his case, the concern with victory seems to predominate over all others, and certainly over honor and luxury. The dialogue shows him quite willing to forego the latter two, provided that the prize being offered in the contest at hand can match his greatness of soul.¹² The prominence of the love of victory in Glaucon, then, intensifies his concern with the quality of the prizes to be won and to this same extent liberates him from the enslavement to mere social rank and respect of

¹⁰ Significantly, recognition by equals is not mentioned.

¹¹ As Socrates intimates, the young timocrat remembers his own mother needling his father about his lack of social status and the disadvantages she endures because of it. Cf. 549c8ff. And cf. Adam's enlightening note on *ou kataphronôn*, p. 215: "...a subtle psychological touch. Those who have no moral or intellectual right to 'despise' inferiors are apt to treat them harshly, in a vain effort to convince themselves of their own superiority."

¹² Cf. the discussion at 398c-405b on the purging of music and culinary finery. Glaucon, who had introduced luxury in the first place, puts up no resistance to its being removed from the city entirely.

person. He is keen to win prizes, to be sure, but he is also keenly aware of the difference between the apparent and true value of prizes.

This links us to a second, closely related, characteristic of Glaucon. Already at the beginning of the dialogue, in exhorting Socrates to defend justice more thoroughly, Glaucon is the first speaker to introduce “*phusis* as a whole” as a theme and with it the distinction between nature and convention.¹³ “Every nature (*pasa phusis*)”, he says, pursues greed or getting the better (*pleonexia*) as a good, it is only by force of law (*nomôi*) that all are made to honor equality” (359c5-6). Indeed, the whole thrust of the Gyges tale is to make visible the true face of nature by making Gyges invisible to all social convention.¹⁴ Throughout the dialogue, Glaucon is Socrates’ companion in every investigation into the essential nature of things, and he is the one who most often makes an appeal to nature in argument (as distinguished from Adeimantus, who is more wont to look to the city and its opinions).¹⁵

Crucially, Glaucon also exhibits some familiarity with and openness to mathematical sciences such as geometry and harmonics, something which is pointedly absent in Critias and Alcibiades.¹⁶ The way in which Socrates discusses mathematics with this young man is most revealing. He emphasizes its “usefulness to warlike men”

¹³ Indeed, he is the first character to mention *phusis* at all. See 359b4: *hê men oun dê phusis dikaiousunês....*

¹⁴ The unjust man, in Glaucon’s story, is the one who has grasped the distinction between what exists truly (*tôi onti*) and life according to opinion and he is concerned with having the true thing (*alêtheias*); viz., actually being unjust and enjoying the benefits of injustice (362a4-6).

¹⁵ Cf. 362d2ff (and note Adeimantus’ concern with the traditional speeches told about the gods), 419a1, 487b1.

¹⁶ Cf. 526a1ff, 528b, 531a-b, 531e.

and the entire discussion of the five mathematical sciences is suffused with martial imagery: the counting of the number of soldiers, pitching of camps, drawing up the array of battle, etc.¹⁷ And yet, these same studies are supposed to lead the soul powerfully “upwards”, away from the realm of becoming, the only realm in which military victory has any meaning, to the study of true being (525b5-7).

The significance of this juxtaposition seems clear enough. Glaucon is higher than Adeimantus, and is therefore the appropriate interlocutor of Books V-VII, because, as a lover of victory more than honor he is at least open to being convinced that the greatest and most satisfying victories of all can be had in contests of the intellect and he can glimpse at least something of their radically different character. In the philosophical warfare of pure *dialegesthai* the combatants are of a most peculiar kind.¹⁸ They strive with all their might to slay one another (or each other’s opinions), but are fully ready, even eager, to be “slain” in turn by the truth, a death which is a kind of resurrection. Each philosophical warrior strives to capture a prize which can, completely and simultaneously, belong to him and to his foe. Glaucon, unlike the timocrat, is at least able to conceive, however imperfectly, of a victory which is “non-subjective” to the extent that involves not the triumph of this or that human being over another, but the triumph of the truth over the human being. To say nothing of other considerations, this

¹⁷ See especially 521d6, 525b4 and 526d1. Dialectic itself is discussed in military terms as a march (*poreia*) 532b5 and cf. also 534c1.

¹⁸ Plato gives us only intimations, never a complete portrait of dialectic. On this, see David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectical Character of Plato’s Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 133ff.

does not appear to have been a possibility open to a Critias (or even an Alcibiades).¹⁹ He is, in this sense, a potential candidate for the *periagogê tês psuchês* of which Socrates will later speak.

Without pushing the schematic too far, then, one can discern an ascending scale of philosophical possibility in Socrates' associates, from Critias through Alcibiades to Plato's brother. Nevertheless, Glaucon is not yet a philosopher and the mathematical sciences are ministerial to philosophy; they are in no way identical with it. Whatever may have been the case regarding Plato's eponymous brother, the Glaucon of the *Republic* is a literary artifact, an image which captures certain aspects of the philosophical nature while excluding others. The ascent comes to a halt before reaching the summit.²⁰

Furthermore, and because of the only partially philosophical inflection of Glaucon's character, the three images cannot be considered undiluted theoretical *logoi* or fundamental ontology. They are precisely images, presented to someone who is not yet in a position to see clearly the original.²¹ They can be best understood as serving two intertwined purposes, each of which is necessary for the education of Glaucon, or, more

¹⁹ Craig, *War Lover*, 113: "Because he is willing to confront any challenge that *he* regards as intrinsically worthwhile, irrespective of whether or not it is popularly honoured, he [Glaucon] is open to the philosophical life should he become convinced that it is the most select and demanding, the most enhancing, the most free and independent and (hence) the most satisfying life."

²⁰ 533a1ff and also cf. 506e1-3. Perhaps, Plato reserves the summit for himself.

²¹ Cf. Glaucon's association of the Good with pleasure even after being told that it provides that power of "being known" to the thing known and the power of knowing to the intellect. Socrates must warn him not to blaspheme: 509a9.

appropriately stated, of the Glaucon-element in the souls of Plato's more philosophical readers. First, the images show the Good as the greatest study, one worthy only of souls of greatest magnitude, power and endurance.²² They are philosophical rhetoric, the bait with which to lure a potential philosophical "puppy." At the same time, however, they are meant to introduce Glaucon to the idea that the profoundly individual and selfish quest to replace opinion with knowledge rests upon an impersonal ground. Glaucon's idiosyncratic mixture of self-interest and philosophical openness is thus a fruitful one since he makes possible images through which Socrates can present together the "subjective" viewpoint from which every soul begins and the speculative whole toward which it is drawn.²³

Sun

Unfortunately, any attempt to explain how the images are related to Glaucon's character seems to be undermined by the fact that the details of the Sun image leave it almost wholly obscure how the Good is supposed to relate to any human life *at all*, to say nothing of a specific potential philosopher. Variations on this theme, which first

²² On this score, at least, Glaucon is convinced. The dialectic Socrates describes is, he says, an enormous task (*suchnon ergon*) (511c3-4).

²³ On this point I depart from Benardete's interpretation of the relationship of the Sun image to Glaucon. He sees Glaucon as primarily in need of a lesson in political moderation. He requires an image of a perfect city in order to be made content with the imperfections of Athens and his dogmatic attachment to politics yields only to an equally dogmatic portrayal of complete wisdom in which philosophy, as love rather than possession of wisdom, would be impossible. See Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 126 and 148. I believe this appraisal of Glaucon misses the degree to which he is both closed *and* open to philosophy. The images, to the degree to which they are calibrated to someone like Glaucon, are both pre-philosophical (or political) as well as philosophical. A more nuanced appraisal of Glaucon's philosophical importance is found in Craig, *War Lover*, 271.

appears in Aristotle, are scattered throughout the scholarly literature on Plato.²⁴ This seeming detachment of the Good from the human is all the more striking given the aforementioned, eminently practical context in which the idea of the Good was first introduced. There, the Good was the most important condition for the possibility of precision, a precision necessary for the city, since the philosopher-rulers must be the most precise (*akribestatous*) guardians (503b5) with natures suited to a study worthy of the greatest precision (*megistas akribeias*)(504e3). The themes of precision and measure arise repeatedly in this section and they underlie Socrates' statement that without the study of the Good, there is no profit in however much other knowledge one might possess (505a6-7).²⁵ And yet, it is entirely unclear how knowledge of the Good itself makes possible the knowledge or valuation of any particular intelligible thing as good; but if each determinate intelligible thing is not seen clearly and distinctly as itself by virtue of the Good then the link which Socrates posits between the precision of the *megiston mathêma* and practical life is entirely unintelligible. This much by way of introduction; we proceed now to the details.

The preface to the image proper begins at 505a2 and continues until 506e4, where Glaucon takes over the conversation and Socrates promises to give him, not the Good

²⁴ For two recent examples, see Bernard Williams, "Plato's Construction of Intrinsic Goodness," in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* ed. Myles Burnyeat (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 129, 134-135. Julia Annas, "Understanding the Good: Sun, Line and Cave, in *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Kraut (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 159: "The Good that is the supreme object of knowledge has nothing to do with one's *own* good; it is the purely impersonal Form of Good."

²⁵ Cf. 503d8, 504b5, 504c1.

itself, but an offspring of the Good most like it (*homoiotatos ekeinôî*). Throughout this proem, Socrates presents the Good to Adeimantus from a distinctly human perspective, as the source of benefit, as something usable, as the *telos* of the soul's activity, even as something to be "possessed".²⁶ The Good is the object of pursuit and choice. However, the image itself is noteworthy for the absence of any mention of eros or possession. The Good is no longer spoken of as the goal of psychic activity, but more generally as the *archê* or cause of the being and intelligibility of all things, not only the human ones. There is no mention of justice, pleasure, prudence or any other human good in the image (except for Glaucon's "blasphemous" identification of the Good with pleasure at 509a8). *Nous* is affected by intelligibility but does not seem to "pursue" it, which is remarkable given the analogy that is supposed to hold between the intelligible realm of the Good and the visible realm of the Sun. Everyone knows that the pupil of the physical eye exerts itself, in the dark, to take in even the most miniscule shaft of light and yet the *omma tês psuchês* is described as entirely passive.

The image also seems to present an oddly truncated picture of the soul. It begins with the distinctions made "in speech" between the many beautiful or good things and the one idea of the beautiful or good which we address as "that which is" (*ho estin*) (507b1-7). And yet the image turns on the distinction between the *visible* (*ta horasthai*)

²⁶ Only by making use (*proschrêsamena*) of the Good do the just things (*dikaia*) and all the rest become useful (*chrêsima*) and beneficial (*ôphelima*). We are later told, at 505d11-e2, that it (the Good) is what the soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything. See the references to *ktêsis* (possession) and *ptaomai* (to possess or procure for oneself) in 505a7-b2.

and intelligible, rather than between speech (or opinion) and being. If the image is supposed to explain the relationship of the intelligible to the whole of genesis (=the realm of the sun) why are “the things” referred to as visible rather than “the sensible” or “the opinable”, both of which are broader terms?²⁷ One opines about the totality of human experience, not only the part of it seen with the eyes.²⁸ The image seems to be structured so that the distinctly human things, *ta anthropina*, and the distinctly human way of experiencing things, drop out of sight.

One of the most illuminating analyses of these peculiarities is found in a brief, published fragment of correspondence by Richard Kennington. He, too, begins by noting that the Good as presented at 508bff is discontinuous with the Good as the *telos* of all psychic activity at 505a-d.²⁹ The Good, as *archê*, rules and governs the whole but is not the goal of the activities of any particulars of genesis, including the soul: “The sun does not shine or generate, nor the *nous* intellect, for the sake of the good” (531). There is, furthermore, no movement in the sun image. Ascent and descent of the soul is “absent in the sun *ikon*” but present in the divided line and the cave....” (532). As for the switch from the opinable to the visible realm as an analogue to the intelligible realm, this too is of a piece with the abstraction from eros, *genesis* and *telos*, that is from the soul

²⁷ Cf. Adam, *Republic*, 66: “*To doxaston* is of course a wider term than *horaton*, for it includes the entire domain of *ta polla*, by whatever sense or faculty apprehended.”

²⁸ In the Divided Line “the opinable” (*to doxaston*) is substituted for the sensible at 510a9 and cf. 534a2.

²⁹ See Richard Kennington, “Two Philosophical Letters,” *Review of Metaphysics* 53 (March 2000): 531-539. (All further references to Kennington’s letter will appear in the text in parentheses).

in general (535). In short, the image presents the good as the principle of a cosmos that is “bathed in light” and can be “taken in at a glance”, instantaneous and comprehensive, and yet it is a “silent cosmos” (535) “somehow without soul” (532).³⁰

Even if we put aside the problem of the soul for a moment, the assertion of a fully illuminated cosmos is itself undermined by the very structure of the analogy: “as the Good is in the intelligible place with respect to *nous* and to the intelligible, so is the sun in the visible with respect to sight and the things seen” (508b13-c2). Kennington shows that this purported analogy does not hold. First, we are given no explanation whatsoever of the relationship between Good and Sun, that is, between the first principle of each *topos*, except to say that the Good generated the sun “in proportion with (or to) (*analogon heautôî*) itself” (508b13), a statement which is almost completely obscure. Secondly, we do not even understand the relationship between the good and the intelligibles, since the analogy would require that the Good be the cause of the *becoming* of the intelligibles as the sun is for “the generation, growth and nourishment of all the visible things” (509b2-4). This, of course, makes no sense unless the intelligibles are part of the realm of genesis, with all the disastrous consequences this would entail for a distinction between being and becoming. In sum, the image is pervaded by ambiguity regarding the status of the intelligible realm. It is said to be one of the two elements of the whole which the image is meant to describe, and yet the intelligible is also the wholeness of the image in two ways: first, in the sense that the Good is the cause

³⁰ Kennington calls it an *ikon* of wisdom (532). Cf. Benardete, *Second Sailing*, 126, 148, 159-160.

of the intelligibility of all things but also because the analogy between the two parts is supposed to be *intelligible* to us as an image of some original. As Kennington writes,

The parts of the *analogia* at 508a form, as said above, something like a whole, a *kosmos*; i.e. an intelligible whole. The anomaly is that “the intelligible,” however, is itself a part of the *analogia* that states this whole: the whole is not intelligible in the way that “the ideas” are intelligible. (534)

As a result, Kennington continues, “the sun *ikon* turns on a “likeness” or an imaging between the intelligible region and the sensible which it asserts but does not account for” (ibid).³¹ Indeed, it cannot account for it because “to recognize an image as an image *of* is a *pathê* and presumably the *dunamis* of the soul” (534) while the image provides no satisfactory account of soul.³² Kennington concludes by remarking that the Sun image has a “pre-Socratic character”, it is a dream of pure visibility which is blinding to the extent that it does not reflect on the soul as the “place” in which this visibility must occur (535). The Socratic correction of the sun icon requires the *Phaedo*’s flight into the *logoi*, or back into the whole of everyday life and speech, and this happens only in the Line and Cave.

Kennington, then, shows that the image is both “epistemologically” and “ontologically” incomplete. It abstracts from the full reality of the soul and is unable to explain how the whole holds together as a unity of visibility and intelligibility grounded

³¹ A similar point is made in Annas, *Understanding the Good*, 146.

³² To mention only one other problem which Kennington notes (533): the image is profoundly unclear as to where one should assign *nous*. It describes *nous* as part of the intelligible realm, although, qua function of the soul it would seem to belong to the perishable realm governed by the sun. If *nous* belongs in the intelligible realm, while sight belongs to the visible, what happens to the “unity and togetherness” of the soul, which both sees and thinks?

in the Good. The pedagogic value of the image lies not in explaining the soul or the whole, but rather in showing that these two purported “wholes” reveal themselves to us only in their problematic nature. Philosophy, then, is the reflection on the problematic nature of the unity of soul and *to pan*.

Up to a point, I agree with these conclusions. However, the reason for the incomplete presentation of the Good does not lie in the Sun image being a “pre-Socratic” abstraction from the soul, which must be corrected in the later images. On the contrary, soul is *not* absent from the image; it is present, but only in one aspect of its conscious activity, namely intellection (*noêsis*). The Sun image is an abstraction only in the sense that it isolates one aspect of a complex unity, in order to allow us to view it with as much clarity as the nature of the subject matter will permit. Abstraction in this sense, however, need not entail forgetting. The image is not so much pre-Socratic as it is “Glauconic”. It is meant to enable Glaucon to “see” an activity of the soul to which he has no unmediated reflective or conceptual access.

To provide a fuller account of this conclusion, let us begin with the emphasis on visibility rather than audibility. Two possible reasons can be advanced for this. First, Socrates does indeed begin from the opinions which men have about the noble, the good and so on. But we are told that every soul is capable of becoming aware of the distinction between the opined, or merely apparent goods, and the true good. That is, every soul is in principle capable of seeing that opinion is only “appearance”, and therefore becoming dissatisfied with it. It is said to do so by virtue of a capacity for

divining (*apomanteuesthai*) (505e1) something about the good.³³ The philosophical soul is perhaps distinguished from all others in seeking to follow up on this divination and convert it into *knowledge* of the difference between knowledge and opinion. I put to one side consideration of whether such a conversion is in fact possible to note the following: either this divination is correct or it is illusory, i.e. mere appearance. If the latter is the case, it is easy to see that philosophy is impossible even in the Socratic sense of knowing, or being aware, or recognizing that one does not know.³⁴ If the former, however, then the divination of a difference between opinions about the good and knowing the good must have some access to the ground of this difference, that is, some access to the good and this access cannot itself be a function the capacity for opining (*doxazein*). It is insufficient to say that this access consists in the realization of the contradictory nature of opinion. To realize that two opinions directly contradict one another and that at least one of them cannot therefore be correct is not yet the same thing as philosophy. In such an exigency, it is perfectly possible to simply hold that one of the opinions (one's own, or the opinion of one's city or tradition) is right to the exclusion of the other opinion, that of the heretics, enemies, or the benighted who walk in darkness. The contradictory nature of *doxa* is indifferently the condition for the possibility of the sectarian and the

³³ The language of divination appears again at 506a8.

³⁴ See Benardete, *Second Sailing*, 138: "The discovery of the difference between opinion and knowledge is a discovery of philosophy....Ignorance is unknown to opinion. Every people is the chosen people and inhabits its privileged cave." If this is the case, however, philosophy cannot avoid undertaking the task of articulating, as fully as it is able, how this difference is available to the soul, and this articulation cannot be simply a restatement of the distinction between the philosopher and the city.

philosopher. The philosopher requires not only the contradictions of *doxa*, but some understanding of how any opinion could ever be *alethê doxa*. Consequently, the philosopher, as opposed to the sectarian or the dogmatist, must have some grasp of intelligibility as such, which allows him to understand the two opinions as distinct, to understand what it even means for there to be a necessary contradiction between judgments, etc.

This is what seems to me to be at issue in the transition from opinable (*doxaston*) to visible (*horaton*). By concentrating on visibility, the image abstracts from speech, the object uniquely appropriate to human hearing. It does this, however, not because it forgets the element of opinion in which the soul necessarily moves, but in order to make visible how the result of discursive thought, the *dianoias apoteleutêsis*, ever succeeds in being about *ta onta*.³⁵ At the moment in which the soul is illuminated by truth, speech is absent and the soul is said to fix itself (*apereisêtai*) upon “truth and that which is” (*alêtheia te kai to on*) (508d5). Soul is said to “have *nous*”, then, when soul comes to a stop.³⁶ It is only when it turns to “coming to be and passing away” – that is, to those things which are themselves in motion – that there is mention of the soul “changing opinions up and down” (508d8-9). Sight lends itself to portraying this peculiarly instantaneous nature of intellection, the “*exaiphnês*”. We can be said to see something at once, while hearing a

³⁵ Cf. *Sph.* 264a12-b1.

³⁶ *Apereidô* can also mean to support oneself, or to come to rest upon.

speech or talking about what we have seen takes time.³⁷ The element of temporality should be emphasized here, as it is intimately related to the distinction between *dianoia* and *nous* or between true and false judgment, on the one hand, and that which is judged truly or falsely on the other. According to the image, when the soul knows (*egnô*) something which is illumined by *alêtheia te kai to on*, it is grasping that thing both as an intelligible part (it grasps the truth and being of *that thing*) but also as a part of the whole (since it grasps that thing *as illumined by the Good*) and it grasps these two together, not as the result of a process of analysis, or predication, or any other discursive faculty. This grasp cannot be identical with discourse or predication since the predicative structure of judgment, if it is *in fact* correct, must follow from the already and always present unity of elements within the “illumined” intelligible.³⁸ Or, in terms of the image, the weaving together of the moments of intelligibility is posterior to and depends upon the

³⁷ Of course, this is metaphorical and not entirely accurate language. We may need to look at an object from several angles in order to say that we have really “seen” it, and this would obviously take time. Furthermore, it is possible to hear a single, sudden sound “all at once”, such as an explosion. Socrates’ choice seems to be based on the fact that the instantaneous vision of sight reveals the visible object with greater immediacy than hearing. If we hear an explosion, we immediately try to discover, or “see”, what caused it. The close affinity of *nous* and vision is, of course, not restricted to Plato. For a discussion of *nous* and *noein* in pre-Socratic philosophy and especially the identification of *nous* with vision in Heraclitus, see Kurt von Fritz, “Nous, Noein, and their derivatives in Pre-Socratic Philosophy (Excluding Anaxagoras): Part I,” in *Classical Philology* 40, no. 4 (Oct. 1945), 234.

³⁸ See Oehler, 79-80: “....das Sein der Prädikation zwar zugrunde-, aber immer auch vorausliegt und als solche frei ist von der Alternative wahr-falsch, *die keine Qualität des Seins ist*, sondern die Modalität der Aussage darüber bestimmt, der Aussage, die, insofern sie *Sein* aussagt, auch die Struktur des Seins hat, nämlich die Struktur der Teilhabe, also etwas aussagt, was vor aller Prädikation in seinem Sein, das heißt, platonisch dialektisch gesprochen, in seinen ontischen Beziehungen bestimmt ist.” [emphases mine] Cf. with Aristotle, *An.Po*, B 19, 100b7 – there can be no scientific, demonstrative reasoning which regard to knowledge of the first principles from which demonstration proceeds. Principles are known by intuition. The same must necessarily hold for essence and predication.

“activation” of *nous* by the Good. Before the soul is able to give a *logos* it must stop speaking and, for the obvious reasons, there can only an imperfect image of this coming to rest, not a fully discursive account. In this sense, the image is an accurate portrayal of the soul by portraying a discontinuity between its intuitive and discursive capacities. In saying that, we admit that it *is* a portrayal of a part of human experience, though not one to which we have conceptual access.³⁹ I shall have more to say on this below.

There is, however, a second reason why Socrates emphasizes a “visible” cosmos, and it will take our analysis farther afield. His choice seems to have something to do not only with the relationship between sight and instantaneity but also with his odd claim that sight is the most “extravagant” (*polutelês*) of the senses (507c7). Unlike hearing, sight requires, in addition to the power of sight in the eye and the power of being seen in the object, a third kind of thing (*triton genos*), namely light, the yoke (*zugon*) uniting the powers of sight and the power of being seen (507e-508a2).

Thinking, then, is likened not to a dyad of intellect and object, but rather a triad of psychic capacity, object and that which yokes them together. But this means that any moment of thought or intelligibility in which some object is present to thinking implicates the *whole* since at each moment at which the soul intellects, it is “activated”,

³⁹ To note only one point: in order for us to know that we are not being “deceived” by Socrates (*eulabeisthe mentoi mê pē exapatêsô humas*)(507a4), in order to be able to grasp that the sun image is an image of the Good, in order to see that “this” (the image) is like “that” (the original), we must already have had some grasp of the Good and this “grasp” cannot be by way of another image. I cannot agree, then, with Benardete’s statement that the Sun image corresponds to no human experience. Instead, it corresponds to that element which is present as hidden in almost all human experience. Benardete, *Second Sailing*, 159.

(for want of a better term) both by the determinate intelligible object which it is now thinking as well as the Good, via the truth and being which it gives to the particular thinkable and to all other “thinkables” (*tois gignôskomenois*)(507e1-2).⁴⁰ That is, the presence of thought in the soul requires the presence of a *triune* intelligible cosmos, which is composed of nous, intelligibility and the Good, which is neither nous nor intelligibility.⁴¹ It is true that the Good is not said to “provide” (*apodidon*) truth for the sake of nous, just as the sun does not shine for the sake of eyes. However, it is also true that *only* when *nous* is actively “intellecting” can we say that all elements of the intelligible cosmos are present. A suggestive hint in this regard is found in the reference to light, which can fulfill its role as the yoke because it is, in Socrates’ very elliptical formulation, “by nature suited to just this purpose (*ep’ auto touto pephukos*)”(507e1). This requires further consideration.

Light may continue to shine even if it shines on nothing, that is, even if there is nothing to be seen. In such a case, however, its particular nature as a source of illumination has no referent; nothing is illuminated. But then similarly, if light illuminates the visible things and by virtue of this they have the *power* to be seen (*tên tou horasthai dunamin*)(509b2) while nothing or no one *sees* them, this power too, which is also a function of light, is not actualized. Light would still be light, it would have its

⁴⁰ This point is quite well made in Lloyd Gerson, *Knowing Persons: A Study in Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 176-177, where he discusses the role of the Good as the unifier of complexity within the *kosmos noêtos*.

⁴¹ The Good is spoken of as that which gives power to the knower (*tên dunamin apodidon*)(508e2) and is beyond being in dignity and power (*presbeia kai dunamei*)(509b9).

illuminative nature, but this nature is fully expressed in all its aspects only when the two powers which light uniquely makes possible, sight and visibility, are also present. The sun, then, may not shine *for the sake of eyes* or visible colors but the full nature of its “being-sun”, the total expression of everything of which it is capable of qua sun, does depend on the presence of both color and sight. If we follow this structure into the intelligible realm, the Good gives truth or “being known” (*to gignôskesthai*) (509b6) to the things known whether or not there is someone there to know them. However, the Good is also the source of “the power” which is present in the knower. Its full nature qua Good, then, is not manifest if all the purposes to which its nature is “suited” (namely, knowing and being known) are not also present. It is not exactly correct, then, to say that, in the Sun image, the cosmos is without soul. The Good cannot be the Good *of the whole* without *nous*. In this limited sense, Plato once again, as he had in the *Charmides*, comes very close to the Hegelian contentions (i) that “the true is the whole” and that (ii) the True, if it is indeed the whole, can only be grasped *simultaneously* as substance and subjectivity.⁴²

We are thus brought to the point at which the *aporiai* of Platonic *noêsis* seem to point directly toward Hegel’s own teaching; the same point at which, I will argue, Plato would part company with him most decisively. I refer to the problem, which has recurred throughout this study, of the relation of temporal consciousness and eternal intelligibility. For the present purposes, we can simply concentrate on this problem as it

⁴² Cf. *PdG*, (22-24, 17-20).

appears in the intelligible realm, without discussing the ever-present difficulty of how the intelligible is supposed to relate analogically to the visible.

Nous is a capacity for being illuminated whenever (*hotan*) it fixes upon truth and “that which is” (508d4). When illuminated by the Good, the soul is able to give knowledgeable accounts of those particular things of which it speaks. That is, the Good, as the source of truth in each particular thing known, makes that thing determinate, knowable as itself, that is, as this or that part which is known *now*, detached from knowledge of the whole. The Good, by contrast, also gives being and *ousia* to *all* things, at *all* times. Indeed, we have already seen how it is only by virtue of the fact that it is the source of being and *ousia* in the whole that it fulfills its role in the part. In other words, the Good is simultaneously the source of the unity of the whole and the intelligibility (but hence detachability) of the parts.⁴³ However, by the very fact that the Good makes available the parts as distinct parts which we pursue, desire, know and account for, it seems to obscure our ability to know how it functions as a whole, as the unity of all the parts. Or rather, to take the same problem from the “psychological” side, the “passive” capacity of *nous* to see the illuminated particular blocks our ability to understand how the Good is both the principle of determinacy of the parts and also that which “illuminates” all of them, or makes all of them parts of a whole.⁴⁴ But of course, if

⁴³ Benardete, *Second Sailing*, 156.

⁴⁴ The Aristotelian distinction between *nous poiêtikos* and *pathêtikos* is clearly moving on the same terrain. See H. G. Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Christopher P. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 88-89.

we lack knowledge of the whole, what could it mean to claim that we have *knowledge* of the parts *as* parts? At best, we could have only intimations, or to use the language of the *Republic*, “divinations” of knowledge of the parts.⁴⁵

This same perplexity accosts us no matter the direction from which we approach the Good. To take one example: in an intractably cryptic passage, the Good is said to provide (*proseinai*) *einai* and *ousia* to the things known although it is itself not being, but “beyond being” (*epekeina tês ousias*) in dignity and power (509b7-8). There has been an impressive variety of attempts to articulate how the Good can both be beyond being and

⁴⁵ If one’s tastes incline toward a rigorously “systematic”, rather than “poetic” presentation of exactly the same problem, it is sufficient to study the relation of essence and attribute in Spinoza. The capstone of Spinoza’s system is the claim that adequate knowledge of the essence of God (or nature) is possible for man as a finite mode. This is accomplished through Spinoza’s famous “third kind of knowledge”, the *scientia intuitiva*, which he identifies with the greatest conceivable satisfaction (*Ethics* V, P27), the *amor dei intellectualis* (VP32C), and beatitude. This knowledge proceeds in two ways: first, “from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things [i.e. finite modes, or simply, the things of experience – A.G.]” (IIP40S2) and, secondly, in reverse order, from knowledge of the essence of singulars to an understanding of their dependence on God (VP36S). However, this knowledge, in order to be distinguished from mere vague experience or *ratio*, depends upon the demonstration at IIP47 that “The human mind has an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” since only knowledge of this essence makes the system a whole such that intuitive knowledge can move from part to whole and back again. Now, the eternal and infinite essence of God creates a problem. IIP47Dem of the *Ethics* shows only that we have knowledge of God’s essence through the various finite modes of *two* of the divine attributes, thought and extension. In ID6, however, God is defined as “a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes each of which expresses and eternal and infinite essence”. But what is the relationship between those attributes of God of which we do have adequate knowledge (thought and extension) and those which also “constitute the essence” of God, but of which we have not any knowledge? This would seem to require a small amendment to the effect that we have adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence insofar as, *but only insofar as*, this essence is expressed in the two known attributes. But then, how can we have adequate knowledge of essence? Is not our knowledge of the known essence and attributes of God necessarily affected by our ignorance of the other essential attributes? We seem to be observing the divine, or the *archê*, only through a keyhole, by means of which we are unable to understand how the “parts” visible to us through the keyhole fit with those which we cannot see (if, indeed, there are any).

yet also, in some sense “be”.⁴⁶ We could, for example, try to understand the Good as Unity (or the One) which is present in each *ousia* as the unity of the particular set of properties which makes up that *ousia*, though unity is neither a further property in the set, nor a set of properties itself. It appears in each different and determinate form though it itself is pure, indeterminate unity, the same in each manifestation. Or perhaps the Good is to be understood as perfection, in which case it “provides” *ousia* to the intelligibles because *ousia* simply is the perfection that characterizes true being as opposed to the particular instance of genesis or becoming, which always falls short in some way.⁴⁷ Or is the Good meant to be both unity and perfection at once? In any possible articulation, however, the problem is to understand *how* precisely that which is the source of determinacy undergoes determination without losing its non-determinate and comprehensive character.⁴⁸ Indeed, even Socrates does not always keep the relation between transcendent Good and determinate being clear, since later in the dialogue, in his non-imagistic presentation of the Good (533a1-534d1), he says that the dialectician is

⁴⁶ Thinking is forced into this unpalatable dilemma by the fact that if we cannot, in some sense, say that the Good “is”, we are left with the result that being and *ousia* are the work, not of the *unity* of Being and Nothing in Hegel’s sense and not even of the miraculous *fiat ex nihilo* (which presupposes that God, at least, does exist) but of *Nothing* pure and simple.

⁴⁷ See Mitchell Miller, “Beginning the Longer Way” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 327 and 337-340. According to Miller, the Good is “perfection as such” or the indeterminate perfection which implicates as its possible complements all the specific ways it might be determined, and these are the Forms. I find Miller’s analysis of many aspects of the five mathematical sciences, Form, and the Good to be very convincing. Even on his premises, however, it remains the case, however, that we have no discursive account of the totality of possible determinations of the Good, whether it is understood as perfection or as unity.

⁴⁸ Benardete, *Second Sailing*, 163: “It is the undisclosed ground of all that it discloses for thinking.”

supposed to separate out in speech (*dioristhai tôi logôi*) the *idea* of the Good and know it in just the same way (*hôsautos*) as he grasps the *logos* of the being of each thing (*ton logon hekastou....ousias*). In this case, however, the Good itself becomes a determinate intelligible, a *hekastou ousia* alongside all the others and we lose any understanding of its role as the *archê* of the whole intelligible realm.⁴⁹

Now, how could we overcome this problem? To state the matter in terms of the image: what is necessary is to somehow combine the capacity of the soul to be temporally illuminated and give an account of each particular it sees, with the perpetually illuminative power of the Good. Or, stated otherwise, the Good's illumination of all beings must be joined together with the characteristic power of conscious personality – *logon didonai*. We would then have the account of the Good both as the source of determinacy in the parts and as the unity of the whole, because *the Good would give the complete and definitive account of itself*. The capacity of the finite intellect to be illuminated would no longer be passively separated from the active principle of illumination. It would be a moment within the Good, now understood as self-conscious. To think this through in conceptual terms is to arrive at the essentials of the Hegelian doctrine of the Absolute Idea.

Clearly, however, there is no unification in Plato, of the Good with consciousness and time. The powers of thought are not self-grounding but “derive” from a Good which is neither self-conscious nor alive. Once again, as in the *Charmides* and the

⁴⁹ See especially, Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 84-86.

Symposium, we encounter the discontinuity between the elements of the whole and a certain priority of rest (=the unchanging Good) to motion (=psychê) within that whole, as well as the inability to dialectically convert this fixed opposition into dialectico-speculative unity. We can get clearer on the reasons for this by turning for a moment to the Divided Line passage.

Line

The Line is more humanly comprehensive than the Sun image. It does not portray the instantaneous capacity for *noêsis*, but rather the totality of psychic capacities, or *pathêmata* (511d7). In line with the greater scope of the image, we find that speech, which was largely absent from the Sun passage, returns with a vengeance in the divided Line, where the visible realm is referred to as “the opinable” (*to doxaston*). Indeed, quite strikingly, *logos* is present in both segments of the intelligible section and there is no mention of intellection as a kind of silent contemplation or vision of Ideas or of the Good. Rather, *noêsis* is embedded within speech, to such a degree that it appears to be nearly indistinguishable from it. As Monique Dixsaut points out in her spirited analysis of this passage, the Line seems to support the identification, in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, of the highest form of knowing with *dialegethai* simply, and not with a pre-dialectical comprehension acquired in an extra-temporal *nunc stans*.⁵⁰ If this is the case,

⁵⁰ Monique Dixsaut, “What is it Plato calls ‘Thinking?’” in *The Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium for Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1997): 20.

however, we still require an explanation for why there should be two different segments in the intelligible part of the Line.

The first step in this regard is to take a closer look at the third segment of the Line, which is *dianoia*. The first feature that springs to mind here is the emphasis on making (*poiêsis*). Those engaged in “geometry, calculation and other such matters” are said to be “makers”. They make “hypotheses” (510c6) of the intelligible objects which are assumed in mathematical science, such as the odd and even, the geometric figures, etc. They also make “speeches” (510d6-8) about the visible copies of such intelligibles (such as a triangle drawn in the sand) although they are not thinking about such visible instances (510d6) but about the thing which they resemble (the pure, geometrical triangle). The *logoi* are about (*peri*) the visibles, but for the sake of (*heneka*) the intelligibles (510d8). The visible things, such as this or that shape are now transformed from objects of the second section of the line, that is, objects of everyday trust, into images through which we see more clearly the intelligible shape.

Dianoia is a “maker”, then, in two senses: it makes, or uses (510e3) the immediately visible objects as “images” which point, in a derivative and imprecise, but nevertheless accessible medium, to the structure which is to be found most precisely in the pure intellectual entities. But these entities, in their turn, are also “made” or posited as hypotheses, which serve as the foundations for a return downward to a more precise knowledge of the structure of the visible. The flaw in dianoetic thought, of course, is that no account is given of how the foundations themselves are known to be foundations

(510c4-d1). The mathematician, for example, simply assumes that the nature of number is something known with sufficient clarity and distinctness by all. This is not to claim that *dianoia* achieves no clarification at all of the objects of the section beneath it. The levels of the line are precisely distinguished and ranked by their relative levels of clarity (509d9), and hence the dianoetic section is higher than the second section, containing “the animals around us, and everything that grows, and the whole class of artifacts” (510a5-6), and this despite the fact that these things, which constitute ordinary experience, possess an immediate familiarity which objects of pure thought do not. As Socrates says of them, they are “around us” (*peri hêmas*)(510a5). What is lacking in the dianoetic section is neither precision nor clarity, as much as clarity about clarity – an explanation of the source of the soul’s power to discriminate, to make precise, to see clearly.⁵¹ This, one might assume, is achieved only when *dianoia* transforms itself into “the power of dialectic” (*hê tou dialegesthai dunamis*)(511b4) in the final and highest segment of the line.

When we turn to the highest segment with this in mind, however, we are presented with a very obscure front. In the lower, dianoetic section, the soul (*psuchê*) was the hero of the tale. “Soul” makes use of images (510b5) and hypotheses (511a4) and then fails to step out above these hypotheses, etc. Soul, however, is never mentioned in the highest segment at 511b3ff. It is true that earlier, at 510b6-9, Socrates says that soul is present in the “other part” (i.e. the highest segment) of the intelligible section, where it

⁵¹ Klein, *Meno*, 122: “the source or sources from which our *dianoia* derives its clarifying function.”

proceeds from hypotheses to a beginning without the use of images, and makes its inquiry exclusively by means of forms. Glaucon, however, does not understand this (510b10). In explaining again the distinction between mathematical and dialectical thought the soul is suddenly replaced by *autos ho logos*, or “*logos* itself” as the subject of the passage:

Well then, go on to understand that by other segment of the intelligible, I mean that which *logos* itself (*autos ho logos*) grasps with the power of dialectic (*têi tou dialegesthai dunamei*), making the hypotheses not beginnings but really hypotheses – that is, steppingstones and springboards – in order to reach what is free from hypothesis at the beginning of the whole. And having grasped this, [*logos*], now depending upon those which depend on this [beginning], goes back down, making no use of anything sensed in any way, but using forms, through forms to forms, it ends in forms too. (511b3-c2)

It is entirely unclear yet what this substitution means. On the one hand, it would appear senseless to interpret this passage as teaching that soul is somehow absent at the most crucial point in what is, after all, an image of the affections in the soul. And in any case, even if dialectic is purely formal discourse, the Forms themselves do not speak, only man does. Are we, then, meant simply to identify the soul with *logos* itself? This too is unsatisfactory, since the soul must progress through imperfect degrees of cognition, while *logos* itself is always exclusively formal and dialectical. On the other hand, it will not do to simply ignore the plain sense of the text and give no explanation for the substitution. This is clearly one of those moments in the study of Plato, where even the most determined and rigorous interpreter finds himself in a situation analogous to a forest at night, where advance is nearly indistinguishable from retreat.

Nevertheless, upon closer examination I believe that an identification of *autos ho logos* as the soul, or as a *pathos* of the soul is impossible. To see why this is the case, we shall proceed by means of a critique of Monique Dixsaut's interpretation of this passage, which aims to prove that the traditional conception of Platonic *noêsis* as pre-conceptual intuition is mistaken.

At minimum, *autos ho logos* is, I take it, purified logos, purified not only of all sensibility but also of all partiality, that is of the unexplained or "undischarged" hypotheses which infect *dianoia*. It is the speech that "grasps" the intelligibles, not singly, but in relation to one another and to the "principle [or beginning] of the whole" - the *tou pantos archê* - which it also grasps. Accordingly, Dixsaut's insistence that *noêsis* in the Line image is not described as silent vision, but instead as identical with *dialektikê epistêmê* is well taken up to a point.⁵² For Dixsaut, the difference between what is grasped of an intelligible being by dialectic and what is grasped by the discursive thought (of the mathematician, for example) is simply a matter of degrees of clarity.⁵³ Thinking, in Plato, is nothing other than the soul's dialogue with itself. Unhappily, Dixsaut's contention is immediately undercut when we try to explain what could account for the difference in clarity. To wit, she fails to explain the difference between

⁵² She also points out that later in Book VII (533e6-534a5) *noêsis* is the general term used to cover both *epistêmê* and *dianoia* and hence is not a technical term for intellectual intuition.

⁵³ Dixsaut, 15. On p. 16, she writes: "....neither vision nor intuition refer to the immediate apprehension of a complete knowledge (which is the classical definition of the term intuition); still less do they refer to a receptive faculty of the soul in her relation to the Forms (which would rather be the Kantian meaning of intuition)." I must say that this seems to me to misread Kant, for whom the pure forms of intuition are aesthetic, not intellectual.

those cases in which the soul, in dialogue with itself, gets something right, or grasps something for what it is, and those in which the soul, in dialogue with itself, judges incorrectly. Clearly, Dixsaut does not intend to claim that every exercise of *dianoia* is “*logos* itself”, but if we are given no understanding of the source of clarity which distinguishes discursive thought from *dialektikê epistêmê* proper we are forced into such an absurd result. Once we reflect on this, I believe that we are led to conclude that “*logos* itself” refers not to the psychic capacity for discursive thought but rather to the relation or ratio between the intelligible elements and the whole, which is *captured* in the psychic capacity known as *noêsis*. To the extent that this *logos* is present within our own, our *dianoia* is dialectical. Dialectic is *dianoia meta nou*, discourse in which intellection is present as the grasp of the *logos* which is always at work among the intelligibles. Dixsaut is right, then, to point out that the highest segment of the line mentions not silent vision, but *logos*, motion, grasping and using. But this *logos* is not finite thought or what she calls the soul’s dialogue with itself at all. It is not the *pathê*, but the object which corresponds to the *pathê* of intellection.⁵⁴

To see why this is the case, one must consider more closely what it means for “*logos* itself” to be dialectical or to have the “power of dialectic” in a way that mathematical thought, for example, does not. The difference between the two has to do with the dependence of *dianoia* on hypothesis as opposed to the “use” by *logos* itself of

⁵⁴ The commentary by Klaus Brinkmann on Dixsaut’s paper brings this out quite well. See p. 29 of his “Commentary on Dixsaut” appended to the same paper.

hypothesis as a “spring-board” from which to reach the *archê*. *Logos* itself deals with the intelligible elements directly (“grasping”), exclusively (“going through forms to forms....”) and also comprehensively in the sense that it “depends on that which depends on this beginning” – that is, every intelligible element is understood in relation to the *archê* and not as a detached intelligible, as it was in the Sun image. This last characteristic seems to me to be the key. *Logos* itself understands an intelligible form to be not an end, or unexplained first principle, or hypothesis, only because it “understands” the relationship of each form to the *archê*, and hence the relationship of each form to the others. As such however, *autos ho logos* depends upon the already complete visibility of the total concatenation, or web, of intelligible elements in all their relations to one another and to the principle. It is the speech which traces completely all of the joints in the web; necessarily so, because only in this way would there be *no* undischarged or unexplained hypotheses. Adam’s commentary puts the point well: “*Logos* is *not* the faculty of reason [emphasis mine]...which is *nous*, but rather the impersonal reason, or drift of the argument....the instrument by which *nous* works.”⁵⁵ What is remarkable about the line image, however, is that the “instrument” which enables *nous* to do its work, the “impersonal” relationship or structure between the intelligibles is described as a living, moving speech, not a silent and petrified cosmos.⁵⁶ It moves,

⁵⁵ Adam, 70 and cf. Stanley Rosen, *Plato’s Republic: A Study* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 265.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic*, 14: “The petrified tranquility of a cosmos of ideas cannot be the ultimate truth for Plato.”

however, as a *completed dialektikê* which includes its *archê* and this is already something radically different from thought as the soul's searching, examining and questioning dialogue with itself. This *logos* is something to which the soul has some access through the *pathê* known as *noêsis*. Our *dianoia* can make progress, can be dialectical, when some part of this intelligible web is illumined for us at any given time, but whatever progress we are in fact making is due only to the fact that we occasionally find ourselves somewhere on the web which "logos itself" grasps, or with which it has direct contact at all times and at all points. It can perhaps be understood, then, as the speech of the definitively wise human being if, *per impossibile*, the intellect were to see the whole intelligible cosmos illumined all at once. Or, to continue our analysis of the previous image, this is what the Good would say if it started to speak.⁵⁷

The progress up the line therefore resembles the development of self-consciousness in Hegel in the following crucial regard: In moving up the line, the soul is moving towards those things which are entirely its own – the totality of *noêta eidê*, as the unique objects appropriate to thinking. But precisely in order for these to be appropriate to thought, that is, in order for intelligible structure to be thinkable, this totality of *eidê*, this *logos itself*, must necessarily *lack* self-conscious subjectivity in several decisive senses.

⁵⁷ It is noteworthy, in passing, that Plato, in contradistinction to Hegel, does not portray comprehensive speech as a circle, but rather as an ascent and a descent. Perhaps this derives from the separate status of the Good. Be that as it may, if the total of intelligible *eidê* is finite, presumably the speech is circular in the sense that it will always say the same thing – the relation of all *eidê* to one another and to the *archê* of the whole. Also worth noting is the connection between *noêsis* in the Line and *noêsis* and *logos* in Parmenides, q.v. von Fritz, 241.

Autos ho logos is entirely impersonal because the fully illumined *kosmos noêtos* does not differ from speaker to speaker; only our perspectives on it differ and we are dealing here with a speech which is no longer perspectival. It is also difficult to see how the speech of the highest section of the line could be about this or that individual soul, even, in this case, about the individual soul of the wise man who speaks it. In this sense, *logos* as completed dialectic would lack the characteristic power of self-conscious reflexivity, since the act of reflection, the self's awareness precisely of *itself*, is that act in which it abstracts from all its other intentional objects of thought and stands in a relation to itself, grasping itself as a unity. But dialectic at the top of the line passage simply *is* all of the parts qua parts, that is, qua parts of the whole. For the whole, understood in this way, there can be no act of reflective unity which is not at the same time the "speaking" of all parts the whole.⁵⁸ If however, there is no self-consciousness to dialectical *logos*, it is also impossible to impute to it personality in any recognizable sense, since personality is a result of the finite nature of the self: the perspectival understanding, emotions, desires, and satisfactions of this or that person in this or that circumstance and in relation to these specific things; precisely what Hegel, in his critique of Plato, calls subjective "interest". The most that can perhaps be said is that *autos ho logos* articulates the form (assuming there is such a form) or nature of soul in general, but not the phenomenological experience of this or that self-aware person.

⁵⁸ For a profound discussion of the problem of reflection and self-consciousness see Dieter Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight," *Contemporary German Philosophy* 1 (1982): 15-52.

Logos itself, qua totality of *eidê*, must always already be actual and complete. It cannot be depend for its completion on the progress of self-consciousness towards that totality without self-consciousness losing its distinctive character as a progress toward *something*. Unlike in Hegel, the principle of personality cannot be universality in the same sense for Plato, because the progress of thought in the Line image presupposes a *difference* between the activity of the soul and the grounds or principles toward which it is directed. In fact, it is only in light of this difference that the distinctive character of subjectivity becomes visible at all.

A standing complaint about the Line image (and the Cave as well) is that knowledge is represented there in purely formal (or even mathematical) terms, which bear no clearly discernible relation to the individual soul or to self-knowledge.⁵⁹ The line begins with *eikasia*, or imagistic thought, before it even deals with our relation to the originals in which we live our everyday lives and it terminates in an intelligible section which seems to be entirely impersonal, thus making it difficult to understand the relationship of the Line to the Good. As Julia Annas remarks, the Good “does not fit into the scheme of the line very happily”. It cannot simply be one of the elements in the intelligible section, but if it is not, it seems to have no place in the image at all, in which case it becomes unclear how it is “that for the sake of which” the soul does everything.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Annas, *Understanding and the Good*, 148-152 and 157-159.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

Annas misses, however, the way in which the highest section of the line is already present in everything the soul does in all other sections. The purification of our grasp of the world is described as a procession upwards from the capacity for image-making (*eikasia*) to the highest realm of the intelligible (*noêsis*) in such a way that each level is distinguished by its relative level of clarity (*saphêneia*) compared to what is below and above it. And the same holds true for the two more general divisions of the line. The visible section is relatively less clear than the intelligible (509d9) just as, for example, the segment of the line which concerns images (*eikones*) is less clear than the section containing those things *of which* the images are images, viz. the visible things themselves. The Line's structural unity emerges from the fact that each lower level depends for whatever clarity it does have on the clarity of the levels above it. For example, the exercise of *eikasia*, which is the capacity for making an image, and consequently also for seeing that an image is an image *of* something, already implicates the ability to distinguish between image and visible original, and this is obviously impossible without a certain grasp of the original. This grasp, in the second section of the visible realm, is called *pistis*, or trust in the stability of those things of which the images are images. And clearly it is our familiarity with the visible things which allows our imaginative capacity to function in the way it ordinarily does. A person lacking completely in this immediate familiarity, which allows him to recognize images as being *of the familiar original*, would not be imaginative; he would be insane.⁶¹ But of course,

⁶¹ See the discussion of the role of *eikasia* in the Line image in Klein, *Plato's Meno*, 112-125.

there would be no trust or familiarity at all were there not *actually* an element of stability within things which invites this trust by allowing us to identify them each time as this thing here. Trust is an expression of the soul's immediate relation to the world; an immediacy only possible because the world exhibits stability. And this of course means that the visible realm and the activities of the soul which relate to that realm are already intimations of the stability of the intelligible realm.

The same holds for the two intelligible sections. The discursive faculty of *dianoia* which is present in all mathematical and technical sciences must use, as the elements of its hypothesis, those intelligible elements (*noêmata*) of which it is not capable of giving a clear account. Nonetheless, discursive thought could not perform even its intermediate function of illuminating, making more precise, or deducing demonstratively the structure of visible things from intelligible hypotheses without the access to those intelligibles which is attributed in its fullest sense to *noêsis*. Noetic intuition is our access to the stability or unity of each item within the realm of genesis, and as such is presupposed in the exercise of *each* of the soul's capacities. While the divided line gives no account of the essence, form or Idea of the soul, its activities are unified in a sense by the fact that *noêsis* is an *immanent telos* – it is both the goal of all the soul's capacities but also already present in each one of them. Stated differently, the exercise of the highest capacity of the soul is a receptivity, but one that simultaneously makes possible all other activities of the soul since the characteristic “work” of the soul is the work of trying to gain access to what *is*.

The progress of theoretical knowledge, then, is a progress in self-knowledge of a kind. We come to know ourselves only by realizing that the accessibility of object to subject, or Being to Thought, is grounded in their difference from one another expressed as the difference between the always actual inter-relation of the intelligible elements and our only occasionally satisfied desire to grasp these elements, or, stated otherwise, the unoblatable difference between eternity and temporality.

As this chapter and its predecessors have tried to show, the problem, from the point of view of the dialogues, is neither the reflexive character of consciousness, nor the conceptual nature of thought, nor the fact that thought and being must be *syngennês* if knowledge is to be possible at all. As the Sun and Line image show, Plato would not deny that philosophy requires that the soul have some access to an intelligible whole in order to even assert the possibility of partial knowledge. Platonic philosophy is a philosophy of self-consciousness, or a “*logos* philosophy” in the sense that it understands man’s perfection to depend upon the giving an adequate *logos* of his thought determinations and his actions, upon understanding himself as fully as possible in articulate speech. That is, human perfection is not the obliteration of consciousness, the unmasking of consciousness as an illusion, or its submergence in an *unio mystica* with the ground of being. However, precisely for this reason the attempt to identify individual self-consciousness as a moment within a self-conscious and self-articulated whole would make the distinctive, “intermediate” nature of man invisible. It would result in the objectification of the living soul. This is the sense in which the unoblatabled

difference between *psuchê* and *phusis* in Plato can be called “good”. The separation between the Good, on the one hand and both being and thinking on the other, or between *psuchê* and *logos* itself, is not an unjust subjection of man to nature or to the merely “given”, but the condition for the achievement of whatever perfection is open to him.

In one sense, all of this simply amounts to a more systematic restatement of Plato’s antiquity. However, as I will try to show in the conclusion, thinking through the consequences of Hegel’s conception of *Absolute Wissen* leads us to exactly the same “ancient” conclusion about the status of subjective self-consciousness.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Hegelian Antiquity, Platonic Modernity?

I close with some remarks of a more general and speculative cast, which, while they must necessarily remain provisional, point to what seem to me to be promising directions for further reflection about the Platonic corpus. Summarily stated, our usual understanding of Plato's place in the history of philosophy is due for a thorough reconsideration. The Platonic dialogues, I suggest, are more properly understood not as the ancient point of departure of subsequent philosophical history, but as ancient and modern at one and the same time. They represent an enigmatic combination of nature and subjectivity, from which both the Greek primacy of *phusis* and the modern concern with the subject derive. The dialogues maintain these two elements in a perpetual tension and do not present a demonstrable metaphysical derivation of either pole from the other.

As for the possibility of providing such a demonstration, which would amount to the full exposition of the gnomic Parmenidean statement that Thinking and Being are the same, I will obey Hegel's dictum not to philosophize with one's ideas in one's pockets and simply assert my view that his attempt to do so not only surpasses all other modern treatments, but in a sense completes them.¹ The Hegelian Absolute is a working out, to fullest possible extent, of the consequences of the philosophical turn to the subject

¹ On philosophizing with our ideas in our pockets, see *VGP*, II, 21, 11: "When philosophers discourse with each other on philosophical matters, they must follow the course of their ideas; *sie können sie nicht in der Tasche behalten.*"

with which this work began. Ironically, however, perhaps the most significant consequence of thinking the Absolute is the realization that some of its most intractable difficulties replicate the same tension I have just noted in Platonic thought. One example of this can be seen if we analyze the case by accepting Hegel's premises and proceeding from within them.

For Hegel, to say that man is first and foremost a being who is self-conscious, or aware of himself, is to presuppose both the difference between the subject and the object, or self and other, and its conceptual overcoming. As such, then, self-consciousness is a process of necessary self-externalization (*Entäußerung*).² Self-consciousness seeks to assimilate every kind of otherness into itself, whether this is understood practically, by transforming the given world it encounters, or theoretically, by understanding the object conceptually in the entirety of its structure. Since each such overcoming of otherness is a return by self-consciousness into a richer and more comprehensive version of itself, each such moment represents a progress in self-consciousness pointing toward complete self-knowledge.

We have also seen why Spirit is essentially discursive and productive. Absolute Knowing entails understanding the *unity* of theory and practice, that is, the fact that the dialectic of action and volition is identical to the dialectic of conceptual thought.³ Thus,

² See *PdG*, 591, 808.

³ For this reason the immediate prelude to the appearance of *Absolute Wissen* in Chapter VIII of the *Phenomenology*, is *action* (*Tat*, *Handlung*). The Christian representation of the truth of Spirit is still incomplete in that the divine object is pictured as separate from the movement of self-

the philosopher in the fullest sense, the one who is able to give an account of the total significance of all *Geistesgestalten*, of all the previous thoughts and actions which constitute the history of Spirit, is *thinking and acting at one and the same time*. His thought is the final and decisive act which reconciles Spirit with itself.

For this reason, there can be no room in Hegel for a faculty of intuition. Such intuitive knowledge, as a grasp of determinate form that is not at the same time a reflexive grasp of the cognizing faculty, would mean that a moment within the life of self-consciousness lacks all self-consciousness. If *nous* has no form it is conceptually inaccessible to us, thus presenting an unexplained caesura at the heart of the Concept. As an immediate, a-temporal union of form and intellect, it would also violate the necessity that Spirit produce from within itself each successive stage of its development. Hence, intuition in Hegel is relegated to the doctrines of Schelling and Fichte, where the Absolute is grasped intuitively as sheer and abstract identity, an undetermined and hence unknowable ground of determinacy.⁴ Science, by contrast, as the form of objectivity, must be *produced* by a consciousness which can give an account of itself (*PdG*, 798, 486). Let us emphasize, then, that for Hegel, human *Dasein* is history, the progress of our theoretical and practical development.

consciousness. This final alienation must be overcome through moral action, which is the self-externalization which overcomes the withdrawn and resigned character of Christian piety. It is "The self-assured Spirit that *acts*; the Self accomplishes the life of the Spirit." *PdG*, 580, 796.

⁴ *PdG*, 17, 10. For a fuller treatment of *intellektuelle Anschauung* see *WdL*, 76-79, 75-78. And on Fichte, cf. *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 81.

But if science is to be really Science rather than contingent or incidental philosophizing (*zufällige philosophieren*)(*PdG*, 37, 34), the theoretical and practical activity of Spirit must be such that each determinate theoretical or practical position or conceptualization, each new step in the “movement of pure essences” (*ibid*), negates itself in such a way as to call forth, in a rigorously necessary manner, a succeeding position of greater complexity, and indeed the whole structure of intelligibility itself. This necessity however, can only be known as necessary once the movement of Spirit is complete and completely known; i.e. when all possible thought determinations have been thought in such a way that knowledge is absolute and can only repeat itself. Or as Hegel says (*PdG*, 575, 788), “in the movement of consciousness achieved by Absolute Knowing, consciousness is the *totality of its moments*”. This is exactly what happens for the first time in the eighth chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Man comes to understand that the divine is not a separate object, ontological category or way of being, such as Aristotelian *noêsis noêseôs* or Spinoza’s “eternal and infinite essence”, but universal selfhood. The divine is identical with fully self-conscious Spirit, which knows the object as itself (*PdG*, 576, 789).⁵ This realization “closes the series of the Shapes of Spirit” (*PdG*, 579 794).

What, then, becomes of our uniquely human *Dasein* – of the inherently historical, individual subject – once the series of shapes of the Spirit is closed? This is, of course, no

⁵ The Concept is a “Self which is for itself” *PdG*, 580, 795. And cf. *PdG*, 582, 798: Absolute Knowing “is Spirit that knows itself in the shape of Spirit, or the comprehensive knowledge.”

trifling matter; it goes directly to the heart of the Hegelian critique with which we began this investigation: Plato's inability to do full justice to the essentially subjective, temporal character of man.

In this regard, the final passages on Time, Concept and Spirit in the *Phenomenology* are apt to be surprising. Absolute Knowing is said to be possible only if the self "dies to its being for self, disowns itself, makes confession" in order to attain pure knowing (*PdG*, 581, 796). That is, self-consciousness as knower (rather than as actor) sacrifices itself for the sake of the thing known, the pure knowledge of essence. Of course, this is not intended in the same sense as Platonic contemplation of form, since what is known here is not a separate and determinate form but the unity of knowledge and action, essence and existence, negation and creation. Not surprisingly then, Hegel insists on the unity of the particular "I" or individual self-consciousness with the universal "I", mediated through all of the thought determinations, or historical shapes of Spirit (*PdG*, 583, 799). Even more radically, until Spirit has completed itself it cannot be said to be self-conscious in the fullest sense (*PdG*, 585, 802). Complete self-consciousness is possible only with the completion of History.

But how is it possible to understand this completion as *self-conscious*, given the intimate connection between self-consciousness and history, that is, between self-

consciousness and time? Time, in Hegel, is a characteristic of finitude.⁶ Self-consciousness, moreover, is itself finitude since self-consciousness is other-relation. Hegel does not shrink from the consequences and insists: "Time....appears as the destiny and necessity of Spirit that is not yet complete within itself" (*PdG*, 584, 801). Precisely as a "historical" being, man is defined by Time understood in the sense of a future in which his projects will be realized, in which that which he does not now understand he *will* understand sufficiently, and so forth.⁷ The final transition from truth represented in its "imagistic" form in Christianity to truth as the complete, conceptual grasp of Absolute knowing thus entails the completion of all practical and theoretical human projects and this means that when the Concept grasps itself it "sublates (*hebt...auf*) its Time-form" and accomplishes what phenomenological consciousness was unable to accomplish so long as it was incomplete: the abolition or canceling (*tilgen*) of Time (*ibid*).

Accordingly, the relation of the Concept to time must differ essentially from that of self-consciousness at all prior stages of phenomenological development. This explains another surprising element which now appears: when the Concept "grasps

⁶ *E* §258R: "Time is not, as it were, a receptacle in which everything is placed as in a flowing stream, which sweeps it away and engulfs it....It is because things are finite that they are in time."

⁷ See Kojève, *Introduction*, 132, 135: Human life as it is actually lived is inexplicable without a metaphysical account of Time. Distinctly human time, however, is characterized by the primacy of the Future, since human life is defined, as we have seen, by desire in a creative sense, desire which negates nature and creates something which is not yet present. Human time is the future of the projects which we have yet to accomplish. But, "this time lasts only as long as History lasts – that is, as long as human acts accomplished with a view to social *Recognition* are carried out".

itself" it becomes a "comprehended and comprehending intuition" (*begriffenes und begreifendes Anschauen*) (ibid). We must of course remember that the appearance of Absolute Knowing at the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* is not yet the same thing as "pure comprehension" of the Concept, which must await the *Logic*.⁸ In the *Phenomenology*, we are witnessing this form of knowledge in its "process of coming to be", or in a more famous phrase, we are climbing the ladder of self-knowledge to the Absolute (*PdG*, 29, 26), a ladder by which self-consciousness arrives at the moment at which it can now think the *Logic* as entirely its own structure. Absolute knowing is the atmosphere in which logical conceptuality studied in the *Logic* can be grasped precisely because it "sets aside its Time form." For this reason, the appearance of intuition here should not be surprising. Absolute Knowing is "conceptualized intuition" in the same sense that the Absolute Idea, at the conclusion of the *Logic*, knows, or "sees" itself as externalized in nature – in other words, the Absolute intuits itself, all at once, as the totality of its possible determinations.⁹ As opposed to Platonic intuition of *eidos*, intuition at the capstone of the system is a grasp of the circular nature of the whole as *already* complete, and in this sense *sub specie aeternitatis*.

If this is the case, however, we find ourselves facing the inescapable conclusion that Absolute Knowing and the intuition by the Absolute Idea of itself in the *Logic*, is

⁸ As Hegel insists at *PdG*, 480, 789 and especially in the Preface at 29, 26: "Pure self-recognition (*Selbsterkennen*) in absolute other-being, this ether *as such* is the ground and soil of science or knowing in general."

⁹ *E*, § 214.

radically other than temporal self-consciousness in any of its manifestations. If we think for a moment of the fully self-conscious philosopher who joins Hegel in thinking through the *Phenomenology* and then the *Logic* (what Kojève calls the “Wise Man” as opposed to the mere lover of wisdom) such a man cannot, by definition, have future projects in any essential sense, since he has no future but a completely comprehended Present. It follows from this that the truly wise man cannot be understood as free in the sense of spontaneous and creative, since there is nothing left to create. He has achieved the goal (*Ziel*) of the Absolute Concept (*PdG*, 591, 808).

But then, he also cannot reflexively grasp himself, since the consciousness of someone who has thought the Hegelian whole is no longer part of the “pilgrim’s progress” of position, negation and sublation. He is *nothing but* the true knowledge of all possible thought determinations. Any attempt to know, or grasp himself separately, as a part of the whole, would represent a step down from complete self-knowledge, just as every step away from the North Pole is necessary southward. The Hegelian wise man thinks the Concept, and not himself as this finite being standing in opposition and relation to other beings, to nature, to the “world”, or to ontological structure. Once he becomes fully wise, man as self-conscious subjectivity is “objectified”, a point made with unsurpassed clarity and force by Kojève:

....when specifically human error is finally transformed into the truth of absolute Science, Man ceases to exist as Man and History comes to an end. The overcoming of Man (that is, of Time, that is, of Action) in favor of static Being

(that is, Space, that is Nature), therefore is the overcoming of Error in favor of Truth.¹⁰

The game, in other words, is up. But then, is it not the case that even for Hegel, we understand subjectivity, or the distinctive way-of-being of human personality only in reference to something which lacks or transcends subjectivity, and the activity of discursive thinking only together with non-discursive contemplation, or *reines Zusehen*?¹¹ And is this result not exactly equivalent – as far as *our* subjective self-conscious experience is concerned – to the absence of self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in Platonic *noêsis*? It would seem that upon deeper reflection, the situation in Hegel exactly resembles the one in the *Symposium*: wakeful Penia is understood only in reference to sleeping Poros.¹² On this point, it seems to me, Hegel is directly exposed to a Platonic *tu quoque*.

It would, of course, be utterly laughable to call the preceding a decisive refutation of Hegel. Glaucon had already reminded Socrates that for those “who have *nous*” the proper measure of listening to arguments is “a whole life” (*R* 450b6-7). In thinking about the relationship of Hegel and Plato, there is neither excuse nor philosophical alternative to facing Hegel’s claims with unrelenting seriousness and on

¹⁰ Kojève, 156 and also 167: “For as he proceeds to the *Logik*, the Wise Man completely abolishes time – that is, History – that is, his own truly and specifically human reality, which already in the *Phenomenology* is but a past reality: he definitively abandons his reality as a free and historical Individual...”

¹¹ *PdG*, 77, 85.

¹² Cf., Kojève’s note on p. 96: “Hegelian philosophy is a *theo-logy*; however, its God is a Wise Man.”

their broadest possible front: the interpenetration of Being and Non-Being, the negating-creating character of all human thought and action, and the way in which the very claim to provisional knowledge of anything points to comprehensive knowledge of everything. Suffice it to say that none of these issues could be exhaustively treated in the present context and one does not refute a spiritual power of Hegel's magnitude with *obiter dicta*. I do wish to argue, however, that what might be called the element of undigested, or unsublated, "antiquity" in Hegel's conception of wisdom illuminates for us a way in which the treatment of a related problem in the Platonic dialogues seems surprisingly modern, or even "post-modern." This insight can be best approached by means of a brief discussion of freedom.

Freedom in Hegel, as the first chapter showed, is never merely negative or undetermined liberty from external constraint. It is ultimately identical with the conceptual understanding of the unity of subject and substance. This is what Hegel means by saying that in grasping the Concept (*Begriff*) "the realm of *freedom* is disclosed" (*WdL* II, 251, 582).¹³ However, we must remember again that each shape of *Geist* that "we" study together with Hegel (natural consciousness, master, slave, stoic, skeptic, unhappy consciousness, etc) is visible qua what it is *not* to the consciousness which undergoes it, but only *for us*, for "observing" consciousness. "We" are where we are only because Hegel has already achieved wisdom by thinking the Absolute Idea and recollecting the whole history of *Geist* in his writings. As Emil Fackenheim notes:

¹³ *PdG* 156, 197 and cf. *E*, §160.

The Absolute [even if] present with us from the start, is known as Absolute and present only to the true philosophy. As for all other forms of human consciousness, the self-examination in which they are engaged "goes on, as it were, behind their backs."¹⁴

Phenomenological consciousness, then, takes on a form without being able to know if this new *Geistesgestalt* is a further development along the road to Absolute knowledge and reconciliation. Of course, the Absolute must be present in each moment of spiritual history, just as the intelligible is present in all other sections of the Line, since the Absolute becomes itself only through the temporal development which is being chronicled and interpreted by Hegel. However, since there is no pre-discursive grasp of the Absolute it follows that, "short of it [the Absolute] there is no satisfaction to be found at any of the stations on the way" (*PdG*, 74, 80). What there is at each stage is only a further discursive articulation, whose place in the whole can only be seen once the Absolute discourse has been *spoken*. But if so, the nature of freedom, as Spirit's progressive remaking of the world, is not visible to empirically existing human beings, since we have no way of seeing our activity as an actualization of some moment of the Absolute. Hence, we also cannot see it *as a progress*. The states, nations and individuals who do the work of *Weltgeist* are, Hegel insists, "*bewußtlose Werkzeuge*", or unconscious tools of History.¹⁵ The *telos*, or end, by which we are able to see whether we are going

¹⁴ Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1967), 34.

¹⁵ *PR*, §344 and cf. §348 therein: "Since these individuals are the living expression of the substantial deed of the world spirit and are thus immediately identical with it, they cannot themselves perceive it...."

up, down or just spinning in circles is not visible to us, since we are in fact in the process of becoming, or discursively producing the *telos* only we cannot yet know this.

Note, however, that the possibility of freedom in the fullest sense depends entirely on the Absolute being in fact absolute; i.e. a comprehensive and unsurpassable logical whole. If the reconciliation of Spirit and nature, of Concept and existence, is not convincingly achieved at the end of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, then it is no longer possible to distinguish between the necessary entailment of thought determinations and mere willful imposition or artifice. Hegel would find himself exposed to the charge found in Derrida, among others; viz., that the Hegelian system is a "text" (in the Derridean usage) which "*interprets* itself: each proposition is an interpretation submitted to an interpretative decision. The necessity of *logical* continuity is the *decision* [emphasis mine] or interpretative milieu of all Hegelian interpretations."¹⁶ But, of course, we can easily decide to replace the Hegelian decision with other, quite different decisions. Philosophical thinking becomes neither the grasping nor the producing of intelligible order, but only the continuous process of differentiation, while experience is a text which is erasing itself even as it is being written.¹⁷ In short, for Derrida, thinking is still Hegel's "labor of the negative", only it produces no Absolute. But once freedom and the Absolute slip from view, so too, must the subject whose nature was supposed to be

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" in *Writing and Difference*, 260. And cf., *ibid.* 277: "It [that is, the "we" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*] does not see the non-basis of play upon which the history (of meaning) is launched".

¹⁷ Philosophy sinks into mere "edification" "...if it lacks the seriousness, the patience and the labor of the negative." *PdG*, 24, 19

defined by them.¹⁸ Hegel would no doubt have recoiled from or laughed at much post-modern thought as a paradigmatic example of “bad infinity” but the tensions within his system at least prepare the way for the post-modern predicament, so fittingly captured by Foucault’s wager (or perhaps it is a hope) that the idea of man is “nearing its end”, that in the future man will be “erased like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea.”¹⁹

It seems to me that many of the Platonic images, and particularly the Cave, seek to avoid exactly this predicament and this might be one way in which the circuitous route which we have taken through the dilemmas of late modern thought make it easier to follow Socrates’ injunction to think the Cave allegory together with the Sun and the Line (517a8-b1).

The Cave is so familiar and possessed of such ravishing artistry that we are inclined to miss its exceedingly odd portrayal of human nature.²⁰ Glaucon says of the prisoners at the beginning of the image that they are strange, or literally, “placeless” (*atopous*) (515a4) and indeed they seem to correspond to no human being we have ever seen. To begin with, it is quite unclear whether the prisoners have the power of speech

¹⁸ Derrida has a great deal to answer for in the way in which he reads (and rewrites) the history of philosophy, but as far as the difference between freedom and sheer randomness is concerned, it cannot be denied that he has his guns trained on a particularly exposed flank of modern thought.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1970), 387.

²⁰ See Rosen, *Plato’s Republic*, 268-275 *in passim* for useful observations on the strangeness of the prisoners at the beginning of the Cave image.

at all.²¹ They certainly cannot see one another; more importantly, they cannot see themselves (515a6). Lacking any capacity for motion, they cannot interact with nor desire one another nor reproduce. There is a distinct suppression of eros and of most other manifestations of human life at the beginning of the image. The most that could be said for self-knowledge at this stage is that the prisoners see shadows of the statues of men being carried by the puppeteers (although it is hard to see how they could identify these as shadows of artifacts of *men* if they cannot see themselves or each other). In short, in the cave there is either no self-knowledge or at best a severely attenuated self-knowledge, mediated through shadows. The soul, in fact, is not even fully present; it does not exhibit its characteristic activity of trying to know what things are.

The fullness of the soul only begins to manifest itself with the man who is “released and suddenly compelled to stand up”. We are not told how this could happen, except that it is “by nature” (*phusei*) (515c5).²² I believe it is fair to say that eros, as the soul’s natural desire to know, breaks the chains of conventional bondage. But, since eros is born of the awareness of a distinction between nature and convention, this is only possible if nature is accessible to us in some sense, even in the almost complete artifice of the cave. What is most telling about this, however, is what eros brings

²¹ Socrates leaves it at the level of conjecture: “If they could discuss with one another (*dialegesthai...pros allêlous*)”, he says, they would hold that they are naming the shadows on the wall which they see (515b4). Even the puppet masters who are free to move about are not said to speak, but only to utter sounds (*phtheeggomenous*)(515a2Cf. also 515b8-9). The verb *phtheeggomai* can be used for human voice, animal cries and even the sound of inanimate objects such as the creaking of a door or thunder.

²² This is another one of the reasons why Annas feels that the Cave image is an example of Plato getting carried away and “overloading” his imagery. Annas, *Understanding and the Good*, 155-156.

immediately in its wake. After the release from the bonds “someone” (*tis*) suddenly appears to speak directly to the prisoner (515d1) and tell him that, having moved away from the shadows, he is “somewhat nearer to what is” (*mallon ti engutterô tou ontos*)(515d3)”. However, merely pointing out the direction of *to on* is apparently insufficient since the released man might very well refuse to believe what he is being told and flee back to the familiar shadows (515e2-4). With eros, then come both speech and the need for compulsion. Indeed, the proliferation of words denoting compulsion and force (*anankê, bia*) in the Cave image is one of its most truly striking, and least remarked, characteristics. The released prisoner must be compelled to stand up, compelled to look at the light, compelled to answer questions, dragged upwards by force out of the cave. To an extraordinary extent, compulsion is the condition for philosophical liberation.²³ This remains true, to a degree, even when the prisoner has left the cave. Human compulsion is now absent, but the released prisoner must accommodate his eyes to the natural necessities of what is “up above”. He cannot look immediately at the objects (not to mention the sun) but must accustom his eyes according to the natural levels of brightness and clarity in the objects to be seen. Only at the end of the process, after having seen the sun itself by itself, does the rational faculty of the soul fully manifest itself. The prisoner is now able to conclude, reckon, or infer (*sullogizoito*) that the sun is the source, steward and cause of all things (516a5-c2).

²³ See 515c6, 515d5, 515e1, 515e6.

How, then, is this an image of “our nature” at all, if the progress in knowledge which it describes is not self-knowledge but rather an ascent in theoretical clarity that leads away from the individual altogether? I would argue that one must realize that the ascent out of the cave is necessarily preceded by a “descent” of the Good, eros and speech into the cave. Only because of the accessibility of nature is it possible to be released from the chains of opinion and only if there is a guide who has been outside the cave in some sense, is it even possible for anyone to say that the prisoner is nearer or farther from the Good. This is why, where there is no distinction made between opinion and knowledge and the shadows of the “things made” (*tôn skeuastôn*) just are the truth (515c2), the soul itself is attenuated. The soul becomes a soul only because of the presence of the Good and the Good *is* present within human life, as attested by the fact that we are able to think, among other things, about this image.²⁴ Glaucon, and Plato’s readers, must already be able to see some things about themselves in order to see that the Cave is an image about “our nature” in its education and lack of education (514a2) but this self-knowledge is parasitic upon the whole because the self is as well. The Cave seems to imply that if we do not have some intelligible access – throughout the whole of

²⁴ Cf. Kojève, 104: For Plato “at every instant of time (of the existence of Man in the World) the same relation to one and the same extra-temporal entity is possible.” Kojève proceeds to identify the extra-temporal entity to which man is related as the *hen agathon*. Cf. Benardete, *Second Sailing*, 177: “....we live in all three orders [cave, sun and good], and the distinctness that the line has extended from itself onto the sun and cave would have to yield to the partial penetration of sun and good into the cave and the partial penetration of good into the sun.....Thinking is present through the entire range of the line.”

lived experience - to *phusis* both as the principle for the being of things and as a standard for the excellence of things, there is no "self" at all. There is only heap of *pathêmata*.

And yet, there is more. The presence of compulsion in the image indicates that the human being does not come fully formed from the hand of nature. In the Sun image, the Good was said to be the "steward and cause of all things" but this cannot be strictly true, since the soul is not simply good but capable of deceiving itself. There is, then, a step-motherly aspect to Platonic *phusis*. The perfection of man in wisdom may be available "by nature" but Plato gives us absolutely no reason to think that it simply happens naturally or that it can ever be completed. Instead, human life is the practical effort of giving order to the soul or *bringing* (and in some cases *forcing*) it under the rule of reason. In other words, "our nature" is distinct among all other natural kinds in that it requires work. One thus meets, in Plato, a distant cousin of two of Nietzsche's greatest insights: that man is the "not-yet-determined-animal" (*das noch nicht festgestellte Thier*) and that, as a consequence, the one thing most needful is to "give style to one's character."²⁵ But, if true, this means that the subordinate status of subjectivity in Plato ultimately derives not from a failure to grasp subjectivity as an *archê*, but from a sensibility, shared with late modernity, that subjectivity cannot be a philosophical origin precisely because it is a *result* – subjectivity must be made. Even more strikingly, we must make ourselves. This might be called Plato's constructivism. Plato, then, already

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5, aph. 62 and *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, aph. 290 in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, heraus. von Colli und Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

found himself wrestling at close quarters with this axial problem of our age. What he did not share with us is the conviction that the making of subjectivity is ever understandable apart from *phusis*. A natural standard for better or worse life must be accessible in order for incomplete human beings to be “subjects”, to make a life for themselves within what Hegel calls the *Via Dolorosa* of uncompleted history. It therefore cannot be derived from subjectivity, however understood. Differently stated, what we do not make and indeed, for Plato, what we cannot claim to make without reducing human life to senselessness, are the standards according to which we are remade.

It is at least doubtful whether, after a long and convoluted philosophical history, we have found this problem to be any more tractable than Plato did. For the philosophical spirit, however, this is no cause for despair. Hegel has already taught us that the philosopher is bored by mere novelty and hates edification. He is perfectly content repeating himself, provided it is the repetition of the truth. Or, as Socrates cheerfully responds to Callicles’ insult that he is always saying the same things: “Not only that, Callicles, but about the same things, too.”²⁶

²⁶ *Grg.* 490e9-11.

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